





BEDOUIN LOVE

ARTHUR WEIGALL



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BY

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*Author of "Madeline of the Desert," "The Dweller
in the Desert," etc.*



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BEDOUIN LOVE. I

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Chapter I: CHOLERA

JAMES Champernowne Tundering-West, or, as for the time being he preferred to be called, Jim Easton, sat himself down on the camp-bedstead in the middle of the one habitable room of a derelict rest-house, built on the edge of the desert some distance behind the houses of the native town of Kôm-es-Sultân. All day long he had been feeling an uneasiness of body; and now, when the incinerating June sun was sinking towards the glaring mirror of the Nile, this vague disquiet developed into a very tangible malady.

He knew precisely what was the matter with him, and his dark, angry eyes rolled around the dirty pink-washed room, as would those of a criminal around the place of execution. Yesterday he had arrived in from the desert, tired out by a four-days' journey on camel-back across the furnace of rocks and sand which separated the gold-mines, where he had been working, from the nearest bend of the Nile. There had been an outbreak of cholera at the camp; and, being the only white man then remaining at the works, which were in process of being shut down for the summer, he had been obliged to stay at his post until, as he sup-

posed, the epidemic had been stamped out. Then, with a handful of natives he had set out for the Nile Valley; but on the journey his personal servant had contracted the dreaded sickness, and the man had died pitifully in his arms, in the stifling shadow of a wayside rock.

The little town of Kôm-es-Sultân was a mere jumble of mud-brick houses surrounding a white-washed mosque; and so great was the summer heat that one might have expected the whole place suddenly to burst into flames and utterly to be consumed. No Europeans lived there, with the exception of a nondescript Greek, who kept a grocery store and lent money to the indigent natives at outrageous interest; but at the village of El Aish, on the other side of the Nile, there was a small sugar-factory, in charge of an amplitudinous and bearded Welshman named Morgan, who, presumably, was now at his post, since, but a few minutes ago, the siren announcing the end of the day's work had sounded across the water. Although six hundred miles above Cairo, Kôm-es-Sultân was not so isolated as its primitive appearance suggested; for it was no more than five miles distant from a railway-station, where, once a day, the roasting little narrow-gauge train halted in its long journey down to Luxor.

Jim cursed his suddenly active conscience that it had not permitted him to take this train as it passed in the morning, for already then he had realized the probability that calamity was upon him; but he had been constrained to remain where he was, alone in the ramshackle and parboiled rest-house outside

the town, for fear of spreading the sickness, and he had determined to wait until an answer came from the Public Health official at Luxor, to whom he had sent a telegram stating that his party was infected, and that he was keeping the men together until instructions were received. He seldom did the correct thing; but on this occasion, when lives were at stake, he had felt that for once the freedom of the individual had to be subordinated to the interests of the community, repugnant though such a thought was to his independent nature.

A dismal sort of place, he thought to himself, in which to fight for one's life! There were two doors in the room, one bolted and barred since the Lord knows when, the other creaking on its hinges as the scorching wind fluttered up against it through the outer hall. A window near the floor, with cracked, cobwebbed panes of glass, stood half open, and a towel hung loosely from a nail in the outside shutter to another in the inside woodwork. In the morning it had served to keep out the early sun; but now the last rays struck through the cracks of the opposite doorway in dusty shafts.

He had told his Egyptian overseer that he was tired, and that he did not wish to be disturbed again until the morning; and he bade him keep the men in the camp amongst the rocks a few hundred yards back in the desert, and prevent them from entering the town. But in thus desiring to be alone he had not been prompted merely by his regard for the safety of others: he had followed also that primitive instinct which his wandering, self-reliant manner of life had nurtured in him, that instinct

which leads a man to hide himself from, rather than to seek, his fellows when illness is upon him. Like a sick animal he had slunk into this desolate place of shelter; and he now prepared himself for the battle with a sense almost of relief that he was unobserved.

He went across to the door and bolted it; then to the window, and pulled the shutters to: but the bolt was broken and the woodwork, eaten by white-ants, was falling to pieces. He took from his medicine-box a large flask of brandy, a bottle of carbolic, a little phial of chlorodyne, and a thermometer. There was a tin jug in the corner of the room, full of water; and into this he emptied the carbolic, shaking it viciously thereafter. Then he saturated the towel with the liquid, and replaced it across the window.

As the first spasms attacked him and left him again, he gulped down a stiff dose of brandy, stripped off most of his clothes, and rolled them up in a bundle in the corner of the room; uncorked the chlorodyne, and lay down on his mattress. His heart was beating fast, and for a while he was shaken with fear. All his life he had smiled at death as at a friend, and, like Marcus Aurelius, had called it but "a resting from the vibrations of sensation and the swayings of desire, a stop upon the rambling of thought, and a release from all the drudgery of the body." Yet now, when he was to do battle with it, he was afraid.

He endeavoured to laugh, and as it were mentally to snap his fingers; and presently, perhaps under the influence of the brandy, he got up from the bed and

fetches from the outer room his guitar, which has been his solace on many a trying occasion. Some years ago, in South Africa, he had set to a lilting tune the lines of Procter in praise of Death; and now, sitting on the edge of the bed, a wild haggard figure with sallow face and black hair tumbling over his forehead, he twanged the strings and sang the crazy words with a sort of desperation.

King Death was a rare old fellow;
He sat where no sun could shine,
And he lifted his hand so yellow,
And poured out his coal-black wine
Hurrah, for the coal-black wine!

There came to him many a maiden
Whose eyes had forgot to shine,
And widows with grief o'erladen,
For draught of his coal-black wine.
Hurrah, for the coal-black wine!

The heat of the room was abominable, and he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, and groaned aloud. Then, returning to his song, he skipped a verse and proceeded.

All came to the rare old fellow,
Who laughed till his eyes dropped brine,
And he gave them his hand so yellow,
And pledged them in Death's black wine.
Hurrah, for the coal-black wine!

The sun set and the stars came out. At length, overcome with sickness, he thrust the guitar aside, and staggered across the room; and presently, when he was somewhat recovered, he groped for a candle, lit it, stuck it in an empty bottle, and lay down again with a gasp of pain.

Now the battle began in earnest, and he made no further attempt to laugh. Taut and racked, he stared up at the dim, cobwebbed ceiling, and swore that no man should come near him so long as there was danger of infection. He was, perhaps, a little pig-headed on this point; but such was his nature. "Live, and let live" had ever been his motto; and now he was putting into practice the second half of that maxim.

The thought occurred to him that he ought to write a will, or some general instructions, in case the "rare old fellow" were triumphant; but, on consideration, he abandoned the idea for the good reason that he had neither property worth mentioning to leave, nor relations to whom he would care to address his last message. Moreover, in his momentary relief from pain, he felt extraordinarily disinclined to bother himself.

He had an uncle—Stephen—who was in possession of a little estate at Eversfield, a small English village in the neighbourhood of Oxford, where the Tundering-Wests had lived for many generations; but he had not seen much of this correct and conventional personage during his childhood, and nothing at all for the last ten years, since he had been a grown man and a wanderer. This uncle had two sons, his cousins: one of them, Mark by name, was, he believed, in India; the other, called James like himself, lived at home. They were were his sole relations, he being an only child, and his father and mother having died two or three years ago, leaving him a few hundred pounds, which he had quickly lost.

There was nobody who would care very much if he pegged out, and in this thought there was a sort of gloomy comfort. Moreover, he was known by his few friends in Egypt and elsewhere as Jim Easton; for, many years ago, at a time when he was reduced to utter penury, he had thought it best to hide his identity, lest interfering persons should communicate with his relations. In the name of Jim Easton he had wandered from place to place, and in that name he had obtained this job at the gold mines; and if now he were to die, the fate of James Tundering-West would remain a matter of speculation. That was as it should be: ever since he left England he had been a bird of passage, and is it not a rarity to see a dead bird? Nobody knows where they all die, or how: with few exceptions, they seem, as it were, to fade away; and thus he, too, would disappear.

He rolled his eyes around his prison, and clapped his hand with pathetic drama to his burning forehead. "Wretched bird!" he muttered, addressing himself. "It was in you to soar to the heights, to go rushing up to the sun and the planets, with strong, driving wings. But the winds were always contrary, or the attractions of the lower air were too alluring; and now you are sunk to the earth, and may be you will never make that great assault upon the stars of which you had always dreamed."

He dismissed these useless ruminations. He was not going to die: life and the lure of the unattained were still before him.

Another and another spasm smote him, tore him asunder, and left him shaking upon the bed. With

a trembling hand he mixed the brandy and chlorodyne, making little attempts to measure the dose. The candle spluttered on the floor near by, and strange insects buzzed around it, singed themselves, and fell kicking on their backs.

He opened his eyes and watched them as he lay on his side, his knees drawn up, and his hands gripping the edge of the bed. Their agonies, no doubt, were as great as his, but, being small, they did not matter. He, too, as Englishmen go, was not large; and it was very apparent that he did not much matter. He was of the lean and medium-sized variety of the race, and was of the swarthy type which is often to be found in the far south-west of England, where his family had had its origin. Some people might have termed him picturesque: others might have said, and most certainly just now would have said, that he looked a bit mad.

At length he slept for a few minutes; but his dreams were hideous, and full of faces, which came close to him, growing bigger and bigger, until, with strange and melancholy grimaces, they receded once more into infinite distance. Somebody grey, ponderous, and very fearful, counted endless numbers, now slowly and portentously, now with such increasing rapidity that his brain reeled.

In this manner the seemingly endless night passed on: a few moments of sleep, a disjointed procession of horrible fantasies, convulsions of pain, staggerings across the room, fallings back on the bed, brandy, and exhausted sleep again. But all the while he knew that he was growing weaker.

Presently the candle went out, and the darkness

closed over his agony. The thought came to him that soon he would no longer have the power to dose himself, and with it came that human desire for aid which no animal instinct of segregation can wholly stifle in a heart weary with pain. It was now long past midnight, and from this time till sunrise he fought a terrible double battle, on the one hand with Death, on the other with Self. It would not be impossible, he knew, to crawl from the room into the silent desert outside, and a cry for help would possibly be heard by his men.

But what would happen? They would go into the town, doubtless carrying the infection with them, and would engage a boat in which they would row across the Nile to fetch Morgan, who had the reputation of being somewhat of a doctor. But Morgan had a wife and child in Wales, who were dependent on him: only last autumn that hairy giant had told him all about them as they sat drinking warm lager in the dusty garden by the river, one hot night, just before the mining party had set out for the distant works.

Thus, when at long last the sun rose and glared into the room, above and below the fluttering towel, he was still alone.

At nine o'clock, as the day's heat and the onslaught of the flies began again to be intolerable, he gave up hope. Until that hour he had fought his fight with decency; but now convulsion on convulsion had dragged the strength out of him, and he was no longer able to crawl back on to the bedstead. The last drops of brandy in a tumbler by his side, he lay limply on the floor; and where he lay, there the

spasms racked him, and there he fainted. With the hope for life went also the desire, and each time that he came to himself he prayed to God for the mercy of unconsciousness. The dying words of Anne Boleyn, which he had read years ago, recurred again and again to his mind: "O Death, rocke me aslepe; bringe me on quiet rest." He kept saying them over to himself, not with his lips, for they were parched, but somewhere deep down in the nightmare of his wandering brain.

Presently a gust of blistering wind flicked the towel from its nail in the window, and with that the creaking shutter slammed back on its hinges, and the sun streamed full on to the white figure on the floor. Jim opened his eyes, bloodshot and wild, and stared out on to the rocks and sandy drifts. A few sparrows were hopping about languidly in the shade of a ruinous wall, their beaks open as though they were panting for breath. The sky was leaden, for the glare of the sun seemed to have sucked out the colour from all things, even from the yellow sand, which now had the neutral hue of Egyptian dust.

This, then, was the end!—and he could shut up his life as a book that has been read. At the age of nineteen he had abandoned the humdrum but respectable City career towards which he was being headed by his father, and, having nigh broken the parental heart, had gone out to Korea as handy-man to a gold-mining company. He had dreamed of riches; his mind had been full of the thought of gold and its power. He had imagined himself buying a kingdom for his own, as it were.

Two years later, utterly disillusioned, he had taken ship to California, and had earned his living in many capacities, until chance had carried him to the Aroe Islands in the pearl trade, and later to the diamond mines of South Africa. Incidentally, he had become, after three or four years, something of an expert in estimating the value of diamonds, and had made a few hundred pounds by barter; but with this sum in the bank he had failed to resist the vagrancy of his nature and the enticement of his dreams, and had returned to Europe to wander through Italy, France, and Spain: not altogether in idleness, for being addicted to scribbling his thoughts in rhyme, and twisting and turning his speculations into the various shapes of recognized verse, he had filled many notebooks with jottings and impressions which he believed to be more or less worthless.

Then he had inherited his father's small savings, and had been induced by a persuasive friend to invest them in an expedition to Ceylon in search of a mythical field of moonstones. Returning in absolute poverty, owning nothing but his guitar and the threadbare clothes in which he stood, he had landed at Port Said, and so had taken reluctant service in this somewhat precarious gold-mining company at a salary which had now placed a small sum to his credit on the company's books.

A roaming, dreaming, sun-baked, Bedouin life!—and this ending of it in a stifling, tumbledown rest-house seemed to be the most natural wind-up of the whole business. Often he had enjoyed himself; he had played with romance; he had had his great moments; but at times he had suffered under a

sense of utter loneliness, and these last months at the mines in the desert had been a miserable exile, only relieved by those silent hours in his tent at night, when he had endeavoured to put into written words the tremendous thoughts of his teeming brain. And now death and oblivion appeared to him as something very eagerly to be desired—a great sleep, where the horrible sun and the flies could not reach him, and an eternal relief from all this agony, all this messiness.

He fumbled for the last of the brandy, knocked the glass over and smashed it. The liquid ran along the floor to his face, and he put out his dry tongue and licked up a little. Then, as though remembering his manners, he rolled away from it, and shut his eyes.

When consciousness came again to him somebody was knocking at the outer door in the hall beyond. A few minutes later there was a shuffling step, and a rap upon the inner door.

"Sir, are you awake?" It was the voice of his Egyptian overseer.

Jim raised himself on his elbows, thereby disturbing the crowd of crawling flies which had settled upon his face and body, and slowly turned his head in the direction of the speaker. "Go away, you idiot!" he husked. "I've got cholera. I'm dying."

"What you say?" came the voice from the other side. "I cannot hear you."

"I've got cholera," he repeated, with an effort which seemed to be bursting his heart. Then, with another purpose: "I'm nearly well now . . . all right in an hour . . . keep away!"

The footsteps shuffled off hurriedly, then stopped. "I go fetch Meester Morgan: he is here this mornin'. I seen him comin' 'cross the river," the man called out; and the footsteps passed out of hearing.

Another convulsion: but this time there was no power of resistance remaining, and long before the spasm ceased he had fainted. The next thing of which he was aware was that the heavy footstep of Morgan was coming towards the house. That frightened rat of an overseer had fetched him, then, and the gigantic fool was going to take the risk! What use was he now? There was easy Death already almost in possession: not the laughing, rare old fellow of his song, but beautiful desirable Rest.

He was powerless to stop the man. His voice failed to rise above a whisper when he attempted to call out a warning. Suddenly his eye lighted on the jug of carbolic a yard away. At least he could lessen the danger. Slowly, and with infinite pain, he wormed himself over the floor, until his limp arm touched the jug, and his fingers closed over the mouth. A feeble pull, and the jug tottered; another, and it fell over with a clatter, and the strong disinfectant ran in a stream around him, under him, through his hair, through his scanty clothes, and away across the room.

The handle of the door rattled. "Are you there, Easton? Let me in!—I know how to doctor you." Another rattle. "Let me in, or I'll come round by the window."

But Jim did not answer. He lay still and death-like as the hulking figure of Morgan scrambled into

the room through the window, and knelt down by his side on the wet floor. The place reeked of carbolic: everything was saturated with it. Morgan stepped through it to the door, and pulled back the bolts. Then, slipping and sliding, he dragged the half-naked, dishevelled body by the armpits into the outer room, and, propping it up against his knees, felt for the pulse in the nerveless wrist.

The morning sun poured in through the broken-down verandah, glistening on the damp hair of the exhausted sufferer, and gleaming upon the bearded, sweating face of the good Samaritan.

Jim opened his eyes, and his cracked lips moved. "Don't be a damned fool," he whispered. "Don't take such a risk . . . every man for himself . . ." His head fell forward once more, and his eyes closed.

"Oh, rot!" said Morgan. "You brave little chap!—I think you've got a chance, please God."

Chapter II: THE CONVALESCENT

A NATIVE doctor belonging to the Ministry of Public Health arrived at Kôm-es-Sultân during the afternoon, having travelled up from Luxor in response to the telegram reporting the infection; and to his care the patient was handed over by Morgan, who had refused to budge until proper arrangements could be made. When, a few days later, the sick man was able to be moved, he was conveyed down to Luxor in a small river-steamer belonging to the sugar factory; and, after ten days in the local hospital, where, in spite of the great heat, he was very tolerably comfortable, he was able to go north in the sleeping-car which, on certain nights during the summer weeks, was attached to the Cairo express, for the benefit of perspiring English officers coming down from the Sudan, and weary officials whose work had called them out into these sun-scorched districts of Upper Egypt.

The doctor in Cairo advised him to move down to the sea as soon as possible; and thus, one early evening at the end of June, as the glare of the day was giving place to the long shadows of sunset, Jim found himself driving through the streets of Alexandria towards the little Hotel des Beaux-Esprits which stands at the edge of the Mediterranean, not far outside the city, and which had been recom-

mended to him as the inexpensive resort of artists and men of letters.

He leant back in the carriage luxuriously, and drank the cool air into his lungs with a satisfaction which those alone may understand who have known what it is to make this journey out of the inferno of an Upper Egyptian summer into the comparatively temperate climate of the sea coast. The streets of Alexandria are much like those of an Italian or southern French city; and as he looked about him at the pleasant shops and the crowds of pedestrians, for the most part European or Levantine, he felt as though he had recovered from some sort of tortured madness, and had suddenly come back to the comprehension and the relish of intelligent life.

For the present there was nothing to mar his happiness. The greater part of a year's salary lay awaiting him in the bank, for in the desert there had been no means of spending money, and his losses had equalled his winnings at those daily games of cards which had at length become so tedious. The mines would remain idle in any event until the temperature began to fall, in September; and thus for the two months of his summer leave he could take his ease, and could postpone for some weeks yet his decision as to whether he would return to that fiery exile, or would fare forth again upon his nomadic travels.

His recent experiences had been a severe shock to him, and for the time being, at any rate, he felt that he never wished to see the desert again. But perhaps when a few weeks of this cool sea air had

set him on his feet once more, the thought of his return to the mines would have lost its terror.

At the hotel he was received by the fat and motherly proprietress, who, having diffidently asked for and enthusiastically received a week's payment in advance, led him to an airy room overlooking the sea, and left him with many assurances that he would here speedily recover from the indefinite stomachic disturbances which he told her had recently laid him low.

On his way through Cairo he had purchased quite a respectable suit of white linen, and so soon as he was alone he set about the happy business of arraying himself as a civilized personage. Although much exhausted by his journey he was eager to go down and sit at one of the little tables overlooking the sea, there to drink his *bouillon*, and to make himself acquainted with his fellow guests; and he paid very little regard to the shaking of his knees and the apparent swaying of the floor when a struggle with his unruly hair had taxed his strength. Prudence suggested that he should remain in his room and rest; but, having been in exile so long, he could not resist the desire to be downstairs, enjoying the coolness of the evening, looking at people and talking to them, or listening to the music provided by the mandolines and guitars of a company of Italians who, presumably, earned their living by going the round of the smaller hotels, and the strains of whose romantic songs now came to him, mingled with the gentle surge of the waves.

Presently, therefore, he issued from his room, and, making for the stairs, found himself walking

behind a young woman similarly purposed. He had not spoken to a female of any kind for nearly a year, and this fact may have accounted for the quite surprising impression her back view made upon him. It seemed to him that she had a wonderful pair of shoulders, startling black hair, and an excellent figure excellently garbed. He hoped devoutly that she was pretty; but, as she turned to glance at him, he saw that her face was perhaps more interesting than actually beautiful. It was like an ancient Egyptian bas-relief—an Isis or a Hathor. It was sufficiently strange, indeed, with the high cheek-bones, the raven-black hair, and the wise, smiling mouth, to arouse his curiosity, and her dark-fringed grey eyes seemed frankly to invite his admiration.

At the foot of the stairs, when he was close behind her, he suddenly felt giddy again, and swayed towards her; at which she stared at him in cold surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said, clutching at the banister, and wondering why the light had become so dim.

A moment later he pitched forward, grabbed at the hand she instantly held out to him, and knew no more.

When he recovered consciousness he was lying upon the bed in his own room, and this black-haired woman whom he had seen upon the stairs was leaning over him—like a mother, he thought—dabbing his forehead with water.

"That's better," he heard her say. "You'll be all right now."

He sat up, at once fully aware of his situation. "I'm awfully sorry," he exclaimed. "Did I faint?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I caught you as you fell."

Jim swore under his breath. "I've been ill," he said. "I didn't realize I was so weak. Did I make an awful ass of myself?"

"No," she smiled, "you did it quite gracefully; and there was nobody about; they were all at dinner."

"Who brought me up here?" he asked.

"I and the two native servants," she laughed, and her laughter was pleasant to hear. "Are you in the habit of fainting?"

"I've never fainted before in my life," said Jim, warmly, "until I had this go of cholera."

"Cholera?" she ejaculated. "You've had *cholera*? How long ago?"

"Oh, I'm not infectious," he smiled. "It was quite a while ago." He gave her the facts with weary brevity: it was a picture that he wished to banish from the gallery of his memory.

"But, my dear friend," she said, "when you've just come out of the jaws of death like that, you must take things easy. You ought to be in bed, toying with a spoonful of jelly and a grape. What's your name?"

"Jim," he answered. "What's yours?"

"That is of no consequence," she replied, smiling at him, as he thought to himself, like a heathen idol.

He was silent for a few moments. He was not quite sure whether it would not now be as well to

kill Mr. Easton and resuscitate Mr. Tundering-West, for at the moment he was anxious to forget entirely his Bedouin life and his exile at the mines, and he was no longer a disreputable beggar.

"I'll call you 'Sister,' " he said at length. "That's what the patients at the hospital call the nurse, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a nurse," she replied. "I've torn your collar in getting it open, and I've dripped water all down your coat."

"I bumped into you when I fell, didn't I?" he asked, trying to recollect what had happened.

"Yes," she answered. "I thought you were drunk."

"Thanks awfully," he said.

"Have you any friends to look after you?" she enquired presently.

"No, nobody, Sister," he replied. "Have you?"

She shook her head. "I hardly know anybody, either. I'm a painter. I've just come over from Italy to do some work." She fetched a towel from the washing-stand. "Now, hold your head up, and let me dry your neck."

"I suppose you don't happen to have a brandy and soda about you?" he asked, when she had tidied him up. He was feeling very fairly well again, but sorely in need of a stimulant.

"I'll go and get you one," she replied; and before he could make any polite protest she had left the room.

He got up at once from the bed, went with shaking legs to the dressing-table and stared at himself in the glass. "Good Lord!" he muttered. "I look

like an organ-grinder after a night out." He combed his damp hair back from his forehead, and sat himself down on the sofa near the open window, a shaded candle by his side. The night was soothingly windless and quiet, and a wonderful full moon was rising clear of the haze above the sea; and so extraordinary was it to him to feel the air about him temperate and kind that presently a mood of great content descended upon him, and, after his startling experience, he was no longer restless to join the company downstairs.

In a short time his nurse returned, bringing him the brandy-and-soda; and when this had been swallowed he began to think the world a very pleasant place.

She fetched two pillows from the bed, and in motherly fashion placed them behind his head; then, sitting down on a small armchair which stood near the sofa, she asked him whether he intended to stay long in Alexandria.

"I have no plans," he told her. "As long as I've got any money in the bank I never do have any. When the money's spent, then I shall begin to think what to do next. I'm just one of the Bedouin of life."

"I am a wanderer, too," she said. And there-with they began to talk to one another as only wanderers can talk. There were many places in France and Italy known to them both, and it appeared that they had been in Ceylon at the same time, she in Colombo, and he up-country in search of his moon-stones.

He felt very much at ease with her, coming soon,

indeed, to regard her as a potential confidant of his dreams. Her enigmatic face was curiously attractive to him, particularly so, in fact, just now, with the screen of the candle casting a soft shadow upon it, so that the grey eyes seemed to be looking at him through a veil. He began to wonder, indeed, why it was that at first sight he had not regarded her as beautiful.

For half an hour or more they talked quietly but eagerly together, while the moon rose over the sea until its pale light penetrated into the room, and blanched the heavy shadows.

"Well, I'm very glad I fainted," he said, lightly, observing that she was about to take her departure.

"So am I," she answered, smiling at him as though all the secrets of all the world were in her wise keeping.

"Tell me, Sister," he asked. "Are you all alone in the world?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it's quite correct to be sitting in a strange man's room?"

"Perfectly."

"Tramp!" he said.

"Vagrant!" she replied.

She rose, and stood awhile gazing out of the open window—a mysterious figure, looking like old gold in the light of the reading-lamp, set against the sheen of the moon.

"It's a wonderful night," he remarked. "You have no idea what it means to me to feel cool and comfortable. The desert up-country is the very devil in summer."

"Yes," she replied, turning to him, "one can understand why Cleopatra and her Ptolemy ancestors left the old cities of the south, and built their palaces here beside the sea."

He smiled, knowingly. "If she had lived up there in Thebes where the old Pharaohs sweated, there wouldn't have been any affair with Antony. She would have been too busy taking cold baths and whisking the flies away. But down here—why, the sound of the sea in the night would have been enough by itself to do the trick."

She looked at him curiously. "To me," she said, "the sound of the sea on a summer night is the most tragic and the most beautiful thing in the world. If I ever gave up wandering and came to rest, it would be in a little white villa somewhere on the shores of the Mediterranean."

"No, for my part, I want to go north just now," he rejoined. "I'm tired of the east and the south: I've got a longing for England."

"It won't last," she smiled. "You don't fit in with England, somehow."

"Oh, I'm a typical Devon man," he declared, recalling, with a sudden feeling of pride, the original home of his family, previous to their migration into Oxfordshire.

She looked at him with a smile. "That accounts for it," she said. "The men of Devon so often have the wandering spirit." She held out her hand. "I must go now. Good night!—I'll come and see how you are in the morning. My room is next to yours, if you want anything."

"Good night, Sister!" he answered. "I'm most

awfully obliged to you. You've done me a power of good."

She smiled at him with the calm, mysterious expression of the old gods and goddesses carved upon the temple walls, and went out of the room; and thereafter he lay back on his pillows, musing on her attractive personality, and wondering who she was. He was still wondering when, some minutes later, the native servant entered with a tray upon which there was a cup of soup, some jelly, and a bunch of grapes.

"Madam she say you to drink it *all* the soup," said the man, "but only eat three grapes, only *three*, she say, sir, please."

"Very well," Jim answered, feeling rather pleased thus to receive orders from her.

That night he slept soundly, and awoke refreshed and almost vigorous. After breakfast in bed he got up, and he had been dressed for some time when his self-constituted nurse came to him.

"Oh, I'm glad you're up," she said, giving his hand an honest shake. "I'm going to take you out on the verandah downstairs. It's beautifully cool there."

Jim was delighted. She looked so very nice this morning, he thought, in her pretty summer dress and wide-brimmed hat; and her smile was radiant. He held an impression from the night before that she was a creature of mystery, a woman out of a legend; and it was quite a relief to him to find that now in the daylight she was a normal being.

As they descended the stairs she put her hand under his elbow to aid him, and, though the assist-

ance was quite unnecessary, it pleased him so much that he was conscious of an inclination to play the invalid with closer similitude than actuality warranted. Nobody had ever looked after him since he was a child, and, as in the case of all men who believe they detest feminine aid, the experience was surprisingly gratifying.

On the verandah they sat together in two basket chairs, and presently she so directed their conversation that he found himself talking to her as though she were his oldest friend. He told her tales of the desert, described his life at the mines, and tried to explain the dread he felt at the thought of returning to them. There was no complaint in his words: he was something of a fatalist, and, being obliged to earn his bread and butter, he supposed his lot to be no worse than that of hosts of other men. After all, anything was better than sitting on an office stool.

She listened to him, encouraging him to talk; and the morning was gone before he suddenly became conscious that she and not he had played the part of listener.

"Good lord!" he exclaimed. "How I must be boring you! There goes the bell for *déjeuner*. Why didn't you stop me?"

"I was interested," she replied, turning her head aside. "You have shown me a part of life I knew nothing about. My own wanderings have been so much more sophisticated, so much more ordinary." She looked round at him quickly. "By the way, I am leaving you to-morrow. I have to go to Cairo for a week or so."

Jim's face fell. "Oh damn!" he said. His disappointment was intense. "Why should you go to Cairo?" he asked gloomily. "It's a beastly, hot, unhealthy place at this time of year."

"I shan't be gone long," she answered. "I just have to paint one picture. And when I come back I shall expect to find you strong and well once more. Then we can do all sorts of wonderful things together." She paused, looking at him intently. "That is something for us to look forward to," she added, as though she were talking to herself.

Chapter III: MONIMÉ

JIM felt the absence of his new friend keenly. She had left for Cairo quietly and unobtrusively, just driving away from the little hotel with a wave of her hand to him, following a few words of good advice as to his diet and behaviour. He had asked her where she was going to stay, hinting that he would like to write to her; but she had evaded a definite reply, saying merely that she was going to the house of some friends. A woman is a figure behind a veil. It is her nature to elude, it is her happiness to have something to conceal; and man, more direct, often finds in her reticence upon some unimportant matter a cause of deep mystification.

"I don't even know your name," he had almost wailed, and she had answered, gravely, "Jemima Smith," as though she expected him to believe it. The hotel register, which he thereupon consulted, contained but three pertinent words: "Mdlle. Smith, Londres," written in the hand of the French proprietress, and that fat personage laughed good-naturedly and shrugged her shoulders when he questioned the accuracy of the entry.

The first days seemed dull without her; but soon the brilliance of the Alexandrian summer took hold of his mind, and dressed his thoughts in bright colours. His strength returned to him rapidly, and

within the week he was once more a normal being, able to sprawl upon the beach in the mornings in the shade of the rocks, staring out over the azure seas, and able, in the cool of the late afternoons, to go to the Casino to listen to the orchestra and watch the cosmopolitan crowd taking its twilight promenade.

And then, one evening, just before dinner, as he sat himself down in a basket chair outside the long windows of his bedroom, high above the surge of the breakers, he glanced into the room next door, which led out on to the same balcony, and there stood his friend, unpacking a dressing-case upon a table before her.

She saw him at the same moment, and at once came forward, but Jim in his enthusiasm was half-way into her room when their hands met.

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you!" he exclaimed, working her arm up and down as though it were a pump-handle. "It's just like seeing an old friend again."

She smiled serenely. "Well, we've had a week to think each other over," she said. She turned to her dressing-case and produced a small parcel. "Here, I've brought you something from Cairo."

It was only a box of cigarettes of a brand he had happened to mention in commendation; but the gift, and her words, set his brain in a whirl, and for some minutes he talked the wildest nonsense to her. He was flattered that she had turned her thoughts to him while she was in Cairo; and now, standing in her bedroom, he was possessed by a feeling of intimacy with her. He wanted to put his arm round her, or place his hand upon her shoulder, or kiss

her fingers, or pull her hat off, or lift her from the ground, or something of that kind. Yet he felt at the same time a kind of dread lest he should offend her. He was perhaps a little bewildered in her presence, for, in some indefinable way, she represented an aspect of femininity which he had only known in imagination. There was nothing of the coquette about her: there was a great deal of royalty. He was inclined, indeed, to wait upon her favours, to accept her *largesse*, rather than to ply her with pretty speeches and attentions; but he was by no means certain that this was the correct method of pleasing her, and he stood now before her, running his hands through his hair and talking excitedly.

Presently, however, she told him to go downstairs and to wait there for her until she was ready to dine with him. He would readily have waited all night for her, had she bid him; and when, after nearly an hour, she joined him, dressed in a soft and seductive evening garment, he led her to their table on the terrace under the stars like a bridegroom at the first stage of his honeymoon.

In all the world there is no conjunction of time and place more seemly for romance than that of a night in June beside the Alexandrian surf. The terrace whereon their table was set was built out upon a head of rocks against the base of which the rolling waves of the Mediterranean surged unseen in the darkness below, as they had surged in the days when Antony lay dreaming here in the arms of Cleopatra. The whitewashed walls of the little hotel, with the green-shuttered windows and open doorway throw-

ing forth a warm illumination, differed in appearance but little from those of a Greek villa of that far-off age; and the stately palms around the building seemed in their dignity conscious of their descent from the palms of the Courts of the Pharaohs.

Across the bay the lights of the city were reflected in the water, and overhead the stars scintillated like a million diamonds spread upon blue velvet. The night was warm and breathless, and the shaded candles upon the table burnt with a steady flame, throwing a rosy glow upon the intent faces of the two who sat here alone, the other guests having finished their meal and gone to the far side of the hotel, where the guitars and mandolines were thrumming.

Their conversation wandered from subject to subject: it was as though they were feeling their way with one another, each eagerly attempting to discover the thoughts of the other, each anxious that no fundamental disagreement should be revealed, and relieved as point after point of accord was found. To Jim it seemed as though the gates of his heart were being slowly rolled back, and as though the strange, wise face, so close to his own, were peering into the sanctuary of his soul, demanding admittance and possession.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed at length. "This is too ridiculous! Here am I falling in love with a woman whose very name I don't know."

She smiled serenely at him, as though his words were the most natural in the world. "Why not call me Monimé?" she said. "Some people call me that. Do you know the story of Monimé?"

Jim shook his head.

"She was a Grecian girl who lived in the city of Miletus on the banks of Mæander, the wandering river of Phrygia, and there she might have lived all her life, and might have married and had six children; but Mithridates, King of Pontus, saw her one day and fell in love with her and somehow managed to make her believe she loved him, too."

The mandolines in the distance were playing the haunting melody "Sorrento," and the soft refrain, blending with the sound of the sea, formed a dreamy accompaniment to the story.

"He carried her away and gave her a golden diadem, and made her his queen; but the legions of Rome came and defeated Mithridates, and he sent his eunuch, Bacchides, to her, here in Alexandria, where she had fled, bidding her kill herself, as he was about to do, rather than endure the disgrace of her adopted dynasty. She did not want to die, but, like an obedient wife, she took the diadem from her head, and tried to strangle herself by fastening the silken cords around her throat."

"I remember now," said Jim. "It is one of the stories from Plutarch. Go on."

"The cords broke, and thereupon she uttered that famous, bitter cry: 'O wretched diadem, unable to help me even in this little matter!' And she threw it from her, and ordered Bacchides to kill her with his sword. . . ."

She paused and stared with fixed gaze across the bay to the lights of Ras-el-Tīn, and those of the houses which stood where once Cleopatra's palace of the Lochias had towered above the sea.

The native waiter had removed the débris of their meal from the table, and the candles had been extinguished. Her hands rested upon the arms of her chair, and there was that in her attitude which in the dim light of the waning moon, now rising over the sea, suggested a Pharaonic statue.

"She died just over there across the water," she said at length. "Poor Monimé. . . ."

Jim put his hand upon hers. Very slowly she turned to him, looked him in the eyes steadily, looked down at his hand, and then again looked into his face.

"Monimé," he whispered, and presently, receiving no response, he added, "What are you thinking about?"

"The River Mæander," she answered. "Our word 'meander' is derived from that name, because of the river's wanderings. I was thinking how I have meandered through life, and now . . ."

"I have no diadem to offer you," he said fervently; "but all that I have is yours to-night. I know nothing about you: I don't know where you come from; I don't know your name. I know only that you have come to me out of my dreams. It's as though you were not real at all—just part of this Alexandrian night; and I want to hold you close to me, so that you shall not fade away from me."

She did not answer, and presently he asked her if she had nothing to say to him.

"No," she replied, "there is nothing to be said, Jim. This thing has come to us so quickly: it may pass away again so soon. It is better to say little."

There came into his mind those lines of Shelley

One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it. . . .

Yet he must needs utter that word, though the past and the future rise up to belittle it.

"I love you," he whispered. "Monimé, I love you."

"Men have said that to me before," she answered, "and there was one man whom I believed . . . We built the house of our life upon that foundation, but it fell to ruins all the same. Soon he ceased to tell me that he loved me."

"You are a married woman then?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Tell me who you are," he begged.

She shook her head. "No," she replied. "I have no name. I have left him."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because we disliked one another. It seemed to me altogether wrong that a man and a woman totally out of sympathy with one another should continue to live together. So I made my exit. I live by selling my pictures."

"Were there any children?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "If there had been, I suppose I should have remained with him. Like flowers, they hide many a sepulchre."

"It was brave of you to go," he said.

"I felt it to be a woman's right," she declared, spreading her hands in a gesture of conviction. "Since then I have been a wanderer. I've had some hours of happiness, some of loneliness, but

always there has been my independence to cheer me, and the knowledge that I have been faithful to my sex, and have not misled others by the usual shams and pretences of the disillusioned wife."

"And what about the future?" he asked.

"My dear," she smiled, "the future is a veil of fog that only lifts for the passage of a soul. When I am about to die I will tell you of my future. But now, while I am in the midst of life, only the present counts."

For some time they talked; but at length when the little band of musicians, whose songs had formed a distant accompaniment to their thoughts, had gone their way, and the sound of the sea alone traversed the silence, she suggested that he should bring down his guitar and play to her.

"The proprietress tells me she has heard you playing in your room," she smiled. "She described it as *très agréable mais un peu mélancolique*."

Jim was not very willing to comply, for he had been termed a howling jackal at the mines, and, indeed, he had once been obliged to black a man's eye for throwing something at him. He had no wish to fight anybody to-night.

His companion, however, was so insistent that he was obliged to fetch the instrument and to sing to her. The darkness aided him in overcoming a feeling of shyness, and presently he passed into a mood which was conducive to song. He sang at first in quiet tones, and his fingers struck so lightly upon the strings that sometimes the rich chords were lost in the murmur of the surf. From sad old negro melodies he passed to curious chanties of

the sea, and thence to the wistful music of the Italian peasants; and as he sang his diffidence left him, and soon his fine voice was strong enough to be heard in the hotel, so that the proprietress and some of her guests came tip-toeing out and stood listening near the open door, the light from the passage illuminating their motionless figures and casting their black shadows across the gravel and on to the encircling palms.

"Listen," said Jim, at length. "I'll sing you some verses I made up when I was in Ceylon."

It was a song which told of a silent, enchanted city built by ancient kings upon the shores of an uncharted sea, where there were pavilions of white marble whose pinnacles shot up to the stars, seeming to touch the Milky Way, and whose domes were so lofty that at moonrise their silver orbs were still tinged with the gold of the sunset. It told how here, upon a bed of crystal, there slept a woman whose hair was as dark as the wrath of heaven, whose breast was as white as the snowclad mountain-tops, and whose lips were as red as sin; and how, upon a hot, still night there came a lost mariner to these shores, who passed up through the deserted streets of the city, and ascended a thousand stairs to the crystal couch, and kissed the mouth of the sleeper. . . .

When he had ended the song there was a moment of silence before Monimé turned to him. "Do you mean to tell me," she exclaimed, "that you have to earn your living at the mines when you can write verses like that?"

"Oh, it's only doggerel," he laughed, "and I

cribbed most of the music from things I'd heard."

"Have you got the poem written down?" she asked.

"No, I've lost my only copy," he answered. "I stuffed it into a hole in the woodwork of my berth on a certain tramp steamer, to keep the cockroaches from coming out. I never could get used to cockroaches."

"Jim," she said, taking his hands in hers, "you are wasting your life."

"I am living for the first time to-night," he replied.

It was midnight when at length they ascended the stairs to their rooms, but there was on his part a mere pretence of bidding good-night at their doors. He knew well enough that presently he would attempt to renew their wonderful romance upon the balcony which connected their two rooms; but for the moment the serene inscrutability of her face baffled him. She neither made advance towards him, nor retreat from him. She seemed, mentally, to be standing her ground, undisturbed, unmoved. The wisdom of the ages was in her eyes, and the smile of precognition was on her lips.

In love, man is so simple, woman so wise. Man blunders along, taking his chance as to whether he shall find favour or give offence; woman alone knows when the great moment has come, that moment when the time and the place and the person are plaited into the perfect pattern. Some women betray that knowledge in their agitation; some are made shy by the revelation; some, again, have the imperturbable confidence of their intuition, and

these last alone are the celestials, the daughters of Aphrodite, the children of Isis and Hathor.

In his room Jim sat for awhile upon the side of his bed, trying to fathom the unfathomable meaning of her expression. His brain was full of her—her hair black as the Egyptian darkness, her eyes grey as the twilight, and her flesh like the alabaster of the Mokattam Hills. There was such modesty, such reserve in her bearing, and yet with these qualities there went a kind of confidence, a self-assurance, which he could not define. In her presence he became aware of the shortcomings of his own sex, rather than of his mastery; yet at the same time he was conscious of an overwhelming intensification of his manhood.

At last, a cigarette as his excuse, he stepped out on to the balcony, and for some moments stood looking out to sea. When he took courage to turn towards her window he found that though the light in the room was still burning, the shutters were closed; and thus he remained, staring at the green woodwork for what seemed an interminable time.

He was about to go back disconsolately to his room when the light was extinguished, and the shutters were quietly pushed open. Who shall say whether she knew that Jim was standing in silence upon the balcony, or whether, being prepared for her bed, she now merely opened the windows that the cool of the night might bring her refreshing sleep? Woman is wise: she knows if the hour be meet.

Chapter IV: BEDOUIN LOVE

JIM awoke next morning with the feeling that he had come back to earth from heaven. The events of the night before seemed to belong to a world of enchantment, and had no relation to the keen, practical sunlight which now struck into his room through the open windows, nor to the cool sea breeze which waved the curtains to and fro, nor yet to the vivid blue sea and the clean-cut rocks which came into sight as he sat up in bed.

"In the next room," he mused to himself, "sleeps a woman who in the darkness was to me the gateway of my dreams, but who in this bright sunlight will be again only a capable, pretty creature and an amusing companion. Night, after all, is woman's kingdom, and in it she is mistress of all the magic arts of enchantment, she becomes greater than herself; but day belongs to man. How, then, shall I greet her?—for my very soul seemed surrendered to her a few hours ago, yet now I find myself still master of my destiny."

Like an artist who steps back to view his picture, or like a poet who measures up his dream, he allowed his mind to take stock of his emotions. When her head had been thrown back upon the pillows, and the white column of her throat could be seen in the dim light of the moon against the black confusion of her hair, it had seemed to him that the

marks of the chisel of the Divine Artist were impressed upon the alabaster of her flesh. It was as though, gazing down at her beauty, his eyes had been opened and he had beheld the handicraft of Paradise.

And when, in his ardour, he had had the feeling of not knowing what next to do nor what words to utter, her silencing loveliness had baffled him, so it seemed, because her body was stamped with the seal of the Infinite and fashioned in the likeness of God. True, she was but imperfect woman; yet the art of the Lord of Arts had created her, and, by the magic of the night, he had found her rich in the inimitable craftsmanship of heaven.

He had seen the glory of heaven in her eyes. He had heard the voice of all the ages in her voice. In the touch of her lips there had been the rapture of the spheres, and the gods of the firmament had seemed to ride out upon the tide of her breath.

But was it she whom he had wanted when he held her pinioned in his arms? He could not say. It seemed more reasonable to suppose that through her he was looking towards the splendour which his soul sought. She was but the necromancy by which he had carried earth up to heaven; she was the magic by which he had brought heaven down to the earth. She had been the door of his dreams, the portal of the sky; and through her he had made his incursion into the kingdom beyond the stars.

"It was only an illusion," he said, as he stood at the window, invigorated by the breeze. "We are actually almost strangers. I don't know anything about her, and she knows little of me. It

was the magic of the night employed by scheming Nature for her one unchanging purpose; and all that happened in the darkness will be forgotten in the sunlight. We shall meet as friends."

To some extent he was right, for when at mid-morning she came down to the blazing beach and seated herself by his side in the shade of the rocks, she greeted him quietly and serenely, with neither embarrassment nor familiarity.

"Are you going to bathe this morning?" he asked her, and on her replying in the affirmative, he told her that he thought he was well enough to do so, too. At this she showed some concern, but he reminded her that the water, at any rate near the shore, was warm to the touch and was hardly likely to do him harm.

The little sandy bay, flanked by rocks which projected into the sea, was the site of a number of bathing huts and tents used by the Europeans who lived in the surrounding villas and bungalows. The breakers rolled in upon this golden crescent, continuously driven forward by the prevalent north-west wind; but at one side a barrier of low, shelving rocks formed a small lagoon where the water was peaceful, and one might look down to the bottom, ten or twelve feet below the surface, and see the brilliant shells and seaweeds almost as clearly as though they were in the open air. So strong was the summer sunlight that every object and every plant at the bottom cast its shadow sharply upon the sparkling bed; and the passage of little wandering fishes was marked by corresponding shadows which moved over the fairyland below.

It was not long before Jim and Monimé were swimming side by side across this small lagoon to the encircling wall of rocks, and soon they had clambered on to them and had seated themselves where the surf rushed towards them from the open azure sea on the one side, drenching them with cool spray, and on the other side the low cliffs and rocks, surmounted by the clustered palms, were reflected in the still water. Here they sunned themselves and talked; and from time to time, when the heat became too great, they dived down together with open eyes into the cool, brilliant depths, gliding amongst the coloured sea-plants, grimacing at one another as they scrambled for some conspicuous pebble or shell, and rising again to the surface in a cloud of bubbles.

It was a joyous, exhilarating, agile occupation, far removed from the enchantments of the darkness; and the glitter of sun and sea effectually diminished the lure of the night's witchery.

"You know," said Jim, suddenly looking at his companion, as they lay basking upon the spray-splashed rocks, "I can hardly believe last night was anything but a dream."

"Let us pretend that it was," she answered. She pointed down into the translucent water. "Life is like that," she said. "We dive down into those wonderful depths when the glare of actuality is too great, and we see all the pretty shells down there; and then we have to come up to the surface again, or we should drown."

"I see," he replied; "I was just a passing fancy of yours."

She answered him gravely. "Women in that respect are not so different to men. Judge me by yourself."

"Oh, but there's a world of difference," he said, chilled by her words. "I am simply a vagabond, a wandering Bedouin, here to-day and over the hills and far away to-morrow."

"I am also a wanderer," she smiled. "We are both free beings who have broken away from the beaten path. We both earn our living, and claim our independence."

"Yet the difference is this," he reminded her, "that the world will shrug its shoulders at my actions, but will condemn yours."

She made an impatient gesture. "Oh, that thread-bare truism!" she said. "I have turned my back on the world, and I don't care what it thinks. I act according to my principles, and in this sort of thing the first principle is very simple. If a woman is a thoughtful, responsible being, earning her own living, and able to lead her own life without being in the slightest degree dependent on the man of her choice, or on any other living soul, she is entitled to respond to the call of nature at that precious and rare moment when her heart tells her to do so. There should be no such thing as a different law for the man and for the woman: there should only be a different law for the self-supporting and the dependent. The sin is when a woman is a parasite."

With that she took a header into the water, and he watched her gliding amidst the swaying tendrils of the sea-plants, like a sinuous mermaid.

When she rose to the surface once more he dived in, and swam over to her, his face emerging but a few inches from hers. "Do you love me?" he asked, smiling amongst the bubbles.

"No, I hate you," she replied, striking out towards the shore.

"Why?" he called after her.

"Because you haven't the sense to leave well alone," she said, and thereat she dived once more, nor came to the surface again until she had reached shallow water.

At luncheon she met him with an ambiguous smile upon her lips; but finding that he was not eating his food with much appetite, she at once became motherly and solicitous, refused to allow him to eat the salad, offered to cut up the meat for him, and directed the waiter to bring some toast in place of the over-fresh roll which he was about to break. At the conclusion of the meal she ordered him to take a siesta in his room, and in this he was glad enough to obey her, for he was certainly tired.

When he woke up, an hour or so later, and presently went out on to the balcony, he saw her standing in her room, contemplating her painting materials.

"May I come in?" he asked.

She nodded. "Have you had a good sleep?" she inquired. "Sit down and talk to me. I have a feeling of loneliness this afternoon. I'm not in a mood to paint; yet I suppose I must, or I shall run short of money."

He went to her side and put his hands upon her

shoulders, drawing her to him; but she pushed him away from her, with averted face.

"I said 'sit down,' " she repeated.

Jim was abashed. "You're very difficult," he told her. "I think that under the circumstances I'd better go. I don't know where I am with you."

"You haven't tried to find out," she answered. "You're quite capable of understanding me: I should never have let you come into my life at all if I had not been certain that you had it in you to understand."

"Tact is not my strong point," he said. "I'm just a man."

"Nonsense!" she replied. "Don't belittle yourself."

He was puzzled. "Why, what's wrong with men?"

"Their refusal to study women," she answered.

She was not in a communicative mood, and would not be drawn into argument. He was left, thus, with a disconcerting sense of frustration, bordering on annoyance. It seemed evident to him that yesterday, by some secret conjunction of the planets, so to speak, their destinies had met together in one sentient hour of sympathy; but that now they had sprung apart once more, and he knew not what stars in their courses would bring back to him the ripe and mystic moment.

An appalling loneliness descended like a cloud upon him, and he was conscious that she too, was experiencing the same feeling. It was the lot, he supposed, of all persons who were born with the

Bedouin temperament; and he accepted it with resignation.

At length she conducted him—or did he lead her?—down to the verandah of the hotel; and now she had her paints with her, and occupied herself in making some colour-notes of the brilliant sea which stretched before them, and of the golden rocks and vivid green palms. Jim, meanwhile, read an English newspaper, some weeks old, which he had chanced upon in the salon; but from time to time he sat back in his chair and watched her as she worked, his admiration manifesting itself in his eyes.

"What are you staring at?" she asked him, presently.

"I was admiring the way you handle your paints," he replied. "You're a real artist."

"The fact that a woman paints," she remarked, "does not mean that she is an artist, any more than the fact that she talks means that she is a thinker. To be an artist requires two things, firstly, that you have something to express, and, only secondly, that you know technically how to express it. It is the point of view, the angle of vision, that counts; and in fact one can say that primarily one must *live* an art."

He nodded. He wondered whether the events of the previous night were but the living of her art; and the thought engendered a kind of mild bitterness which led him to give her measure for measure. "I know what you mean so well," he said, "because I happen to have the talent to put things into nice metre and rhyme; but it is the subject matter that really counts, and that's where I feel my

stuff is so flat. Sometimes I am obliged to seek experience to help me."

"You must let me see some of these poems," she said, pursuing the theme no further.

He shook his head. "They are only doggerel, like the one I sang last night," he laughed. "They are as shallow as my heart."

She resumed her painting and he his reading; but his mind was not following the movement of his eyes.

He was thinking how little he understood his companion. She was clearly a woman of strong views, one who had taken her life into her own hands and was facing the world with reliant courage. In fact, it might be said of her that she was the sort of woman who would not be turned from what she knew to be right by any qualms of guilty conscience. He smiled to himself at the epigram, and again allowed his thoughts to speculate upon her alluring personality.

He found at length, however, that the matter was beyond him; and presently he turned to his reading once more.

It was while he was so engaged that suddenly he sat up in his chair, gazing with amazement at the printed page before him.

"Great Scott!" he whispered, pronouncing the words slowly and capaciously. There was a crazy look of astonishment upon his face.

"What's the matter?" she asked, glancing at him, but unable to tell from the whimsical expression of his mouth and eyes what manner of news had taken his attention.

He looked at her as though he did not see her. Then he read once more the words, which seemed

to dance before him, and again stared through her into the distance of his breathless thoughts.

"News that concerns you?" she asked.

He nodded, holding his hand to his forehead.

"Bad news?"

"Yes," he answered, as though speaking in a dream. "Very bad . . . wonderful!"

She could not help smiling, and her intuition quickly jumped to the truth. "Somebody has died and left you some money?" she suggested.

He uttered an almost hysterical laugh. "I'm free!" he cried. "Free! I shall never have to go back to the mines."

He sprang to his feet, folding the newspaper, and crushing it in his hand.

"Don't go and faint again," she said, quietly.

He laughed loudly, and a moment later was hastening into the hotel. He snatched his hat from a peg in the hall, and hurried out through the dusty little garden at the front of the building, and so into the afternoon glare of the main road. Here he hailed a carriage, and, telling the driver to take him to the Eastern Exchange Telegraph office, sat back on the jolting seat, and directed his eyes once more to the Agony Column of the newspaper. The incredible message read thus:

JAMES CHAMPERNOWNE TUNDERING-WEST, heir to the late Stephen Tundering-West, of the Manor, Eversfield, Oxon, is requested to communicate with Messrs. Browne & Beadle, 135A, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London.

His uncle was dead, then, and the two sons, his unknown cousins, must have predeceased him or died with him! He had never for one moment thought of himself as a possible heir to the little property;

and heaven knows how long it might have been before he would have had knowledge of his good fortune had he not chanced upon this old newspaper.

Arrived at his destination, he despatched a cablegram to the solicitors, notifying them that he would come to England by the first possible boat. Then he drove on to Cook's office in the heart of the city, which he reached not long before it closed; and here, after some anxious delay, he was told that a berth, just returned by its prospective occupant, was available on a French liner sailing for Marseilles that night at eleven o'clock. This he secured without hesitation, and so went galloping back towards the hotel as the sun went down.

In the open road, between the city and the hotel another carriage passed him in which Monimé was sitting, on her way to dine with some friends, of whom she had spoken to him. He waved to her, and both she and he called their drivers to a halt. Then, hastening across to her, he told her excitedly that he was sailing for England that night.

"You see, I've inherited some property," he explained. "I must go and claim it at once."

Her face was inscrutable, but there was no light of happiness in it. "I'm sorry it has come to an end so soon," she cried.

"What?" he cried, and it was evident that he was not listening to her. "You've been wonderful to me. We mustn't lose sight of each other. This thing has got to go on and on for ever."

He hardly knew what he was saying. An hour ago she had been almost the main factor in his existence. Now she was but a fragment of a life he was setting behind him. It was almost as though

she were fading into a memory before his very eyes. He was, as it were, looking through her at an amazing picture which was unfolding itself beyond. The yellow walls of the houses, the sea, the palms, the sunset, were dissolving; and in their stead he was staring at the green fields of England, at the timbered walls of an old manor-house last seen when he was a boy, at the grey stone church amongst the ilex-trees and the moss-covered tombstones.

"I must go on and pack at once," he said, standing first on one leg and then on the other. "You're sure to be back before I leave. You can get away by ten, can't you?"

He wrung her hand effusively, and hurried to his carriage, from which, standing up, he waved his hat wildly to her as they drove off in opposite directions.

But when the clock struck ten there was no sign of Monimé, and a few minutes later the hotel porter, who was to accompany him to the harbour, began to urge him to delay his departure no longer. Being somewhat flurried, he thought to himself that he would write her a farewell letter from the steamer, and give it to the porter to carry back with him.

But by the time he had found his cabin and seen to his baggage, the siren was blowing, and the porter in alarm was hurrying down the gangway.

"I'll write or cable from Marseilles," he said to himself. "I don't suppose she cares a rap about me: the whole thing was due to our romantic surroundings. But still one would be a fool to lose sight of a real woman like that . . . I wish I knew her name."

Chapter V: THE SQUIRE OF EVERSFIELD

THE art of life is very largely the art of burying bones. That is the science of mental economy. When a man is confronted with a problem which he cannot solve; when, so to speak, Fate presents him with a bone which he cannot crack, sometimes, without intent, he slinks away with it and, like a dog, buries it, in the undefined hope that at a later date he may unearth it and find it then more manageable.

Even so, during the sea voyage, Jim unconsciously buried the bewildering thought of Monimé. He was a careless fellow, very reprehensible, having no actual harm in him, yet bearing a record pock-marked, so to speak, with the sins of omission. He was one of the world's tramps by nature; and now once more he was out upon the high road, and the lights of the city wherein he had slept had faded behind him as he wandered onwards into another sunrise. It is true that he wrote her a long and intense letter upon the day after his departure, and that he posted this upon his arrival at Marseilles; but his brain, by then full of other things, conjured up no clear vision of her, and his heart sent forth no impassioned message with the written word. He had been deeply stirred by her, but also he had been baffled; and, as in the case of a dream, he made no effort to retain the sweetness of the memory.

On the morning of his arrival he called at the office of the solicitors who had inserted the advertisement, and was not a little startled to find himself greeted with that kind of obsequiousness which he had supposed to have vanished from Lincoln's Inn fifty years ago.

The little pink-and-white man who was the senior partner, and whose name was Beadle, rubbed his hands together as though he were washing them, and actually walked backwards for some paces in front of his visitor, bowing him into a shabby leather chair which stood beside the large, imposing desk.

"I hope," he crooned, when Jim had established his identity, "that we may still have the duty, and pleasure, of serving you, sir, as we have served your uncle and your grandfather."

"I hope so," replied Jim. "I suppose you know all the ins and outs of the family affairs."

Mr. Beadle smilingly directed the young man's attention to a number of black tin boxes stacked in the corner of the room. "The Tundering-West documents for the last two hundred years," he declared, blowing his breath through his teeth, an action which served him for laughter.

Jim had a vision of legal formalities and lawyers' rigmaroles—things which he had always detested; and the passing thought contributed to the growing dislike he felt for the harmless, but sycophantic, Mr. Beadle.

"Well, first of all," he said, "tell me what my inheritance consists of, and what sort of income I've got."

Mr. Beadle explained that the little property

comprised some two hundred acres, most of which were rented; the score of houses and cottages which constituted the tiny little village; the small but comfortable manor-house; and twenty thousand pounds of invested capital. This was better than Jim had expected, and his pleasure was manifest by the broad smile upon his tanned face.

"You see, you will have quite a comfortable income in a small way," the solicitor told him. "I do not think that your duties will embarrass you. You will find your tenants very respectful and deferential country-people, who will give you little bother; and your obligations as landlord will be very easily discharged."

"They're a bit behind the times, eh?" suggested Jim.

"Ah, my dear sir," said Mr. Beadle, "I am thankful to say that there are still some parts of the English countryside where a gentleman may live in comfort, and where the people keep their place."

Jim was astonished by the remark, for he had believed such sentiments to be entombed in the novels of long ago. "Poor old England!" he murmured. "We're a comic race, aren't we, Mr. Beetle?"

"'Beadle,' " the little old man corrected him; and "Sorry!" said Jim.

They spoke later of the tragedies which had thus brought the inheritance out of the direct line, and hereat came the conventional sighs from Mr. Beadle, as forced as his laughter. Jim was told how his cousin, Mark, had died in India of pneumonia, and how his uncle and the remaining son, James, having gone to the Lakes that the old gentle-

man might recover his equanimity, were both drowned in a sudden squall while sailing at a considerable distance from the shore. The bodies were recovered and brought to Eversfield for burial; and very solemnly the solicitor produced a photograph of the memorial tablet which had been set up in the church.

"Some day, I trust a very long time hence, your own mural tablet will be set up there," he said, after Jim had handed back the photograph in silence. "*Nihil enim semper floret; ætas succedit ætati,*" as the good Cicero says."

"Quite so," said Jim.

"It has all been a terrible blow to me," sighed Mr. Beadle. "The late Mr. Tundering-West treated me quite as a personal friend."

"Did he really?" Jim was going to be rude, but checked himself. He felt an extraordinary hostility to this well-meaning but servile little personage. "I shall go down there to-morrow," he remarked, as he rose to take his departure, "and I'll probably have the house thoroughly renovated before I go into it."

"I don't think you will find much that requires alteration," Mr. Beadle assured him, his hand raised in a gesture of deprecation. "Hasty changes are always undesirable; and, when you have grown into the spirit of the place I think you will find that you have a duty to the past." He checked himself, and bowed. "I trust you will not mind an old man giving you that advice," he murmured, as they shook hands. He bowed so low that it appeared to be a complete physical collapse.

On the following day Jim motored to Eversfield in a hired open car. He could with greater ease have gone by train to Oxford, and could have driven over in a fly; but he wanted to have the pleasure of spending some of his new money, and, moreover, a fifty-mile drive through the fair lands of Berkshire and Oxfordshire in the radiance of a summer's day appealed to his imagination. Nor was he disappointed. He acknowledged the beauties of the land of his birth with whole-hearted pleasure; and his eyes, weary with long gazing upon leaden skies and burning sands, were soothed in a manner beyond scope of words by the green fields, the soft foliage of the trees, and grey skies of a hot, hazy morning. It is true that the roads were extremely dusty, and that his face and clothes were soon thickly powdered; but, as the chauffeur had provided him with a pair of motoring glasses, he was not troubled in this respect.

The little hamlet of Eversfield lay seemingly asleep in its hollow amidst the richly timbered hills, as, at midday, he drove up to the grey stone gates of his future home. Here was the narrow village green just as he had last seen it when he was a boy: on one side of the lane which opened on to it were these imposing gates; on the other side were the little church and moss-covered gravestones leaning at all angles, as though the dead were whispering together deferentially at the entrance of the manor. Upon the green were the old stocks, and the stump and worn steps of the ancient cross; and behind them stood the thatched cottages backed by the stately elms.

"I suppose in years to come," he thought, "I shall be walking through these gates to the church on Sundays, followed by the lady of my choice and half-a-dozen children; and the villagers will nudge one another and say 'Here comes Squire and all his little squirrels.' . . . Good Lord!"

The exclamation was due to the sudden feeling that he had walked into a trap, that he had been caught by immemorial society, and would soon be forced to conform to its ways; and, as the car passed in at the gates of the manor, he had, for a moment, a desire to jump out and run for his life.

A short, straight drive, flanked by clipped box-trees, led to the main door of the timbered Tudor house; and here the new owner, dusty, and somewhat untidily dressed, was received by the gardener and his buxom wife, who had both grown grey in his uncle's service. The man held his cap in his hand, and touched his wrinkled forehead with his finger a number of times, painfully anxious to find favour; while his wife curtsied to him at least thrice.

"Are you the gardener?—what is your name?" Jim asked briskly, feeling almost as awkward as the man he addressed, but determined to go through the ordeal with honour.

"Peter, sir," said the gardener. "Peter Long-arm, sir. I rec'lect you, sir, when you was no more'n so 'igh, I do."

"Why, of course," Jim replied. "I remember you now. You're the fellow who told my uncle when I broke the glass of the forcing frame."

The old man looked sheepish. "I 'ad to do my dooty, sir," he said. "I ask your pardon."

"Duty," Jim thought to himself. "I'm beginning to know that word. I wonder what it really means." He turned to the woman. "Now, please go and open the doors of all the rooms, and then leave me to walk through the house by myself." He wanted to be alone to realize his new possession and to dream his dream of future ease. Mrs. Longarm eyed him nervously for a moment before obeying his instructions; she told her husband afterwards, with tears in her eyes, that she felt as though she were surrendering the house to a cut-throat foreigner.

As he wandered, presently, from room to room he was at first overpowered by the feeling that he was intruding upon the privacy of some sort of family life which he did not understand. His uncle's wife had been dead for three or four years, but there were still many traces of her influence: the drawing-room, for example, was furnished in a style which called to his mind faded pictures of feminine tea-parties. Here was the old piano upon which the good lady must have tinkled the songs of which the music still lay in the cabinet near by—songs such as *My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair*, and *Ah, Welladay my Poor Heart*. And here was the little sewing-table where had doubtless rested the silks and needles for her embroidery. Perhaps it was she who had chosen the gilt-framed engravings upon the walls—the depressed picture of "Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness;" a youthful portrait of Alexandra, Princess of Wales; "Jacob weeping

over Joseph's coat;" the sprightly "Hawking Party," and so forth.

Looking around, he experienced a sensation of mingled mirth and awe, and he hoped that the ghost of his aunt would not haunt him when he laid sacrilegious and violent hands upon these things, as at first he intended to do. The chintzes appeared to be of more recent date; but these, too, would have to go, for, as a pattern, he detested sprays of red roses tied with blue ribbons.

The dining-room, hall and staircase, being panelled and hung with family portraits, were impressive in their conveyance of a sense of many generations; and the hereditary library, if sombre, was interesting. Jim was very fond of old books, and he stood there for some time taking the calf-bound volumes from the shelves, and turning over the ancient pages. But, the morning-room, with its red-covered chairs, its mahogany sideboard, and its sham Chinese vases, was distressing. Yet here, as in the drawing-room, there was a chaste and awful solemnity, from which he shrank, as a conscientious Don Juan might shrink at a lady's *prie-Dieu*.

The larger bedrooms upstairs, with their mahogany wardrobes and heavy chests of drawers full of clothes, and cupboards full of boots and hats, were startling in their association with their late tenants. On a table beside his uncle's bed there lay a recent novel, which Jim himself had also just read: it constituted a gruesome link between the living and the dead. He glanced about him and through the window, down the drive, almost expecting to see the apparitions of his relatives stalking up from the

family vault in the churchyard to see what he was about. His uncle would probably think him a dreadful scallawag, for the old gentleman had been an accredited pillar of Church and State, with, so the cupboards testified, a mania for collecting the top hats he had worn on Sundays or when in town. He had been a model of propriety, and the monumental stone, the photograph of which he had seen at the solicitors, stated that he had "nobly upheld the traditions of his race."

Jim felt depressed, and presently went out into the garden which was ablaze with flowers; and here, after a late meal of sandwiches, eaten upon an ornamental stone bench, his spirits revived, for the manor and its setting formed a very beautiful picture. If only he could get rid of all those hats and clothes and old photographs!

A sudden idea occurred to him: he would go and find the padre, and tell him to take these things for the poor of the parish. They must be got rid of at once, even though every man in the village be obliged to wear a top hat. They must all be gone before he came here again, or he would never bring himself to live in the house at all! He hurried down the drive, asked Peter Longarm at the lodge to point out the vicarage to him, and thereafter hastened on his errand.

Near the church, however, and at a point where a gap in the trees revealed a distant view of the dreaming, huddled spires of Oxford, flanked by the lonely tower of Magdalen College, he met with a white-bearded clergyman whom he presumed to be the vicar, and at once accosted him.

"Excuse me," he said, ingratiatingly, barring his way. "Would you care to have some old hats?—I mean of course, would your flock like to wear them?—Top hats, you know, and old boots, too, if you want them."

The elderly gentleman was annoyed, and, with a curt "No thank you, not to-day," proceeded on his way. Jim, however, called after him, coaxingly: "They are quite good hats really; they only want brushing."

At this the man of God stopped and turned, looking at Jim's somewhat dusty figure with wonderment. "Do I understand that you are selling old hats?" he asked, endeavouring to speak politely.

Jim rushed feverishly into explanation. "No, I want to get rid of them," he gabbled; "I want to get rid of all sorts of things—hats, coats, trousers, dressing-gowns, shirts, vests, boots, slippers, old photographs, umbrellas . . ." He paused for breath, inwardly laughing.

Very slowly and deliberately the clergyman adjusted his eyeglasses low down upon his nose, and stared at Jim. "Young man," he said, "is this a jest at my expense?"

"Good Lord, no!" Jim answered. "I'm in deadly earnest. I can't possibly live in the house with all these things. You *will* help me, won't you? How would it be if you came over to-morrow and cleared them all out, and then had a meeting or something, and gave them as prizes to the regular church-goers?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," the

clergyman responded, gently but firmly pushing him aside. "Good-day!"

Jim stared at him as he walked off. "You *are* the vicar, aren't you?" he asked.

"No, I'm not," the other replied somewhat sharply, over his shoulder; "I'm the President of Magdalen."

Jim uttered an exclamation of impatience, and hastened on to the vicarage.

The servant who appeared in response to his knock, was about to ask him his name, when the vicar, an old man with a clean-shaven, kindly face, and grey hair, happened to cross the hall.

"Yes, what is it, what is it?" he asked, coming to the door, while the maid retired.

"Are you the vicar?" Jim asked, beginning more cautiously.

"I am," the other responded.

"You really are? Well I want to ask you about some old clothes. I . . ."

The vicar held up his hand. "No, I have none to sell you," he said smiling sadly. "I wear mine out."

Jim laughed aloud. "First I'm thought to be selling them, and now you think I'm buying them," he exclaimed. "We certainly are a nation of shopkeepers."

The vicar was puzzled. "I don't understand. What is it you want?"

"I have a lot of hats and old clothes I want to get rid of. I thought you might like them."

The clergyman bowed stiffly. "It is very kind of you," he said frigidly. "My stipend, I admit, is

small, but I am not yet reduced to the necessity of wearing a stranger's cast-off clothing."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," Jim hastily explained. "And they're not mine: they belonged to my late relatives. I am just coming to live at the manor, and I thought the poor of the parish would . . ."

The vicar interrupted him. "I beg your pardon. Are you . . .?" He hesitated, incredulous.

"Yes, I'm the new Tundering-West," Jim told him.

The other held out his hands. "Well, well!" he cried. "And I thought you were . . ." He hesitated.

"The old clothes man," laughed Jim.

"Oh, very droll!" the vicar smiled, shaking him warmly by the hand. "How ridiculous of me! Do come in, my dear sir!"

Jim followed him into the drawing-room, and here he found a little old lady, who was introduced to him as Miss Proudfoote, and a florid, middle-aged man with a waxed moustache, who looked like a sergeant-major, and proved to be Dr. Spooner, the local medical man. They had evidently been lunching at the vicarage, and were now drinking the post-prandial concoction which the English believe to be coffee. They both greeted him with a sort of deference, which however, did not conceal their curiosity.

During the next ten minutes Jim heard a great deal of his "poor dear uncle" and his unfortunate cousins. The tragedy of their deaths, it seemed, had cast the profoundest gloom over the village; but it was a case of "the King is dead; long live

the King!" and all three of his new acquaintances appeared to be anxious to pay him every respect.

Dr. Spooner asked him from what part of England he had just come, and the news that he had been living abroad and had not visited the land of his birth for many years caused a sensation. The thought occurred to him that he ought not to mention Egypt, or any other land which had recently known him as Jim Easton; for any such revelations might bring discredit upon him, and he wished to start his life at Eversfield without any handicap. He therefore spoke only of California, referring to it casually as a country where he had resided.

Miss Proudfoote turned to the vicar. "Is it not extraordinary," she said, "how many of our young men shoulder what Mr. Kipling calls 'the white man's burden' and go forth to live amongst the heathen?" Her geography was evidently at fault, but out of consideration for her years and her sex, no correction was forthcoming. "I suppose," she proceeded, "you met with our missionaries out there? It is wonderful what a great work the Church Missionary Society is doing all over the world."

The Doctor here had the hardihood to interpose. "Oh, but California is a part of the United States of America . . ." he ventured.

"How foolish of me!—of course," smiled the old lady. "The Americans are quite an educated people. I met an American traveller once in Oxford: a pleasant spoken young man he seemed, so far as I could understand what he said."

"Yes," remarked the vicar, "America can no

longer be called 'the common sewer of England,' as it was when I was a boy."

Jim stared from one to the other in amazement. "But America is the largest and most progressive part of the Anglo-Saxon race," he protested. "They are already ahead of us in many ways."

Miss Proudfoote was shocked, and she showed it. "It is evident that you do not know England," she replied, coldly.

"I mean," he emphasized, "it always seems to me a fine thought that England can never die, because she will live again over there; and then she'll have another lease of life in Australia; and so on. This England here may die, but the English will go on for ever and ever, it seems to me. And wherever their home may be," he added, laughing, "they'll always think it 'God's own country,' and think themselves the chosen people."

Miss Proudfoote looked anxiously at him, hoping that there was some good in him. "I trust," she said, "that it is now your intention to settle down?"

"Yes," he replied. "I fancy my wanderings are over."

"Heaven has placed you in a very responsible position," she said, gazing earnestly at him. "I am sure our best wishes will be with you in your duties."

"Yes, indeed," sighed the vicar, whose name, as Jim had just ascertained, was Glenning. "Are you a married man, may I ask?"

"Oh no," Jim replied.

Miss Proudfoote patted his arm. "We shall have to find you a wife," she smiled.

Jim was aghast, and hastily changed the subject. "Now about the old clothes," he began.

Mr. Glenning coloured, slightly. "What an absurd error for me to have made," he said. "Now, tell me, what is it you wish me to do?"

"I'm going back to London to-day," Jim explained, "and I want you, while I am away, to go through all my uncle's things, and give away to the poor everything you think I shall not want. Just use your own judgment."

"It will be a melancholy duty," he replied.

"I'm sure it will," the new Squire answered, "but, I tell you frankly, anything useless I find here when I return I shall burn."

The vicar raised his hands; the doctor sniffed; and Miss Proudfoote looked at the stranger indignantly.

"That is rather hasty, is it not?" she asked, tremulously.

Jim felt awkward. He had made a bad impression, and he knew it. "You see," he tried to explain, "my uncle died so suddenly and the place is littered with his things. All I want to keep is the furniture, and the silver, and the books, and that sort of thing, but I will see to that myself."

Miss Proudfoote turned away suddenly and Jim, to his horror, saw her raise a handkerchief to her eyes. He could have kicked himself. He wished the floor would open and engulf him. He looked in despair at the two men.

"You know I haven't seen my uncle since I was a boy," he stammered. "I am a complete stranger."

"He was our very dear friend," said Mr. Glenning.

Chapter VI: SETTLING DOWN

WHILE the congregation in the little church at Eversfield was singing the last hymn of the morning service the October sun passed from behind an extensive bank of cloud, and its rays shot down through the plain glass window upon the figure of a young woman, whose sudden and surprising illumination instantly attracted many pairs of eyes to her. She looked, and knew it, like a little angel as she stood in this shaft of brilliance, hymn-book in hand, singing the well-known words in a voice which enhanced their ancient sweetness; and the vicar, from his place at the side of the small chancel, fixed his gaze upon her with an expression of such saintly beatitude upon his face as to be almost idiotic.

Her name was Dorothy Darling; but her mother, who here stood beside her in the shadow under the wall, called her Dolly, and rightly congratulated herself upon having chosen for her only baby, twenty-three years ago, a name of which the diminutive was so appropriate to the now grown woman.

In the sunshine the girl's soft, fair hair looked like a puff of gold, and her skin like coral; and the play of light and shade accentuated the pretty lines of her figure, so that they were by no means lost under the folds of her smart little frock. Her large, soft eyes were as innocent as they were blue,

and never a glance betrayed the fact that she was singing for the direct benefit of the new Squire, whose head and shoulders appeared above the carved wooden walls of the sort of loose-box which was his family pew.

The miniature church, though dating from the twelfth century, still retained the features by which it had been transformed and modernized in the obsequious days of Walpole and the first of the Georges. The pews for the "gentry" were boxed in, and each was fitted with its door; but the walls of Jim's pew were higher than the others and its area bigger. At the back of the church there were the open seats for the villagers and persons of vulgar birth; but the woodwork here was not carved, save with the occasional initials of lads long since passed out of memory.

At the sides of the chancel were set the mural tablets which recorded the genealogical lustres of dead Tundering-Wests, back to the day when a certain Captain of Horse had obtained a grant of the manor from the Commonwealth, in lieu of his devastated estate in Devon, and, with admirable tact, had married the daughter of the exiled Royalist owner. Around the whitewashed walls of the small nave large wooden boards were hung, upon which were painted the arms and quarterings of the successive Squires and their spouses; and above the chancel arch the royal Georgian escutcheon was displayed in still vivid colours.

The church, indeed, was a tiny monument to all that glory of caste which its Divine Founder abhorred, and which the aforesaid Roundhead, mis-

apprehending the unalterable character of his fellow-countrymen, had apparently fought in his own day to suppress.

When the hymn was finished, the blessing spoken, and Mr. Glenning gone into the vestry behind the organ, this traditional distinction between the classes was emphasized by the behaviour of the little congregation. Nobody of the meaner sort moved towards the sunlit doorway until Jim, looking extraordinarily embarrassed, had marched down the aisle and had passed out into the autumnal scurry of falling leaves, followed closely by Mrs. and Miss Darling, Mr. Merrivall of Rose Cottage, Dr. and Mrs. Spooner, and old Miss Proudfoote of the Grange; and, when these were gone, way had still to be made for young Farmer Hopkins and his wife, Farmer Cartwright and his idiot son, and the other families of local standing.

Outside, in the keen October air, Jim paused under the ancient ilex-tree, and turned to bid good-morning to the Darlings. Dolly had interested and attracted him during these three months since he took up his residence at the manor; but he had been so much occupied in settling himself into his new home that he had not given her all the attention he felt was her due, now that the shaft of sunlight in the church had revealed her to him in the palpable charm of her maidenhood.

He greeted her, therefore, with cheery ardour, as though she were a new discovery, and walked beside her and her mother down the path which wound between the moss-covered gravestones, and out into the lane under the rustling elms. A great change

had come over him since he had returned to England: he had become in some ways more normal, and the quiet, simple life of an English village had, as it were, taken much of the exotic colour out of his thoughts. In the romantic East he had looked for romance, but here in the domestic West his mind had turned towards domesticity. His poetic imagination was temporarily blunted; and whereas in Alexandria he had responded eagerly to the enchantments of hour and place, in Eversfield he was readily satisfied with a more rational aspect of life.

He turned to the mother. "What a little picture your daughter looked, singing that hymn in the sunlight," he remarked, with enthusiasm.

Mrs. Darling sighed. Twenty years ago she, too, had been a little picture; but, so she thought to herself, she had had more character in her face than Dolly, and less softness. Outwardly her little girl took after that scamp of a father of hers, whose innocent blue eyes and boyish face had won him more frequent successes than his continence could handle.

"Yes," she replied, evasively, "that is Dolly's favourite hymn. . . . She has a nice little voice."

"Delightful!" said Jim. "I didn't know hymns could sound so beautiful!"

Dolly looked at him as our great-grandmothers must have looked when they said, "Fie!"

"Aren't you a regular church-goer?" she asked, gazing up at him with childlike eyes.

"Can't say I am," he answered, with a quick laugh. "I'm new to all this, you know. I've knocked about all over the world since I left school.

But, I say!—that family pew, and the respectful villagers!—they give me the hump!”

“Oh, I think it is charming, perfectly charming,” said Mrs. Darling.

“Well,” he replied, “I expect I’ll get used to it. I suppose this sort of life grows on one: in some ways I’m beginning to have a sort of settled feeling already.”

They were walking away from the gates of the Manor, which rose opposite the ivy-covered church, and were approaching the picturesque little cottage where the Darlings lived. Jim paused, and as he did so Dolly experienced a sudden sense of disappointment. She had hoped that he would accompany them to their door, and she had intended then to entice him through it, and to show him over their pretty rooms and round the flower-garden and the orchard. Until now they had only occasionally met, and their exchanges of conversational trivialities had been carried on in the lane, or at the door of the church, or outside the cottage which served as the post-office. He seemed to be a difficult man to take hold of; and during the last few weeks, since her mind had begun to be so disastrously full of the thought of him, she had felt ridiculously frustrated in her attempts to develop their friendship. Frustration, of course, is woman’s destiny, which meets her at every turn; but in youth it sometimes serves as her incentive.

“Won’t you come in and see our little home?” she asked. “It’s rather a treasure.”

He shook his head. “I’m afraid I can’t,” he replied. “I promised to go round my place with the

gardener this morning. He'll be waiting for me now. But, I say, what about dinner to-night? Won't you both dine with me?" He was feeling reckless.

Dolly's heart leapt, and, in a flash, she had selected the dress she would put on, and had considered whether she should wear the little diamond pendant or the sham pearls.

"We shall be delighted," murmured Mrs. Darling. "Eh, Dolly?"

The girl looked doubtful. "I don't know that we ought to to-night," she answered. "We had half promised to drive over to a sort of sacred concert affair in Oxford."

"Oh, don't disappoint me," said Jim. "I've got the house almost shipshape now; I'd like you to see it."

Dolly did not require really to be pressed; and soon the young man was striding homewards down the lane, wondering why it had taken him three months to realize that this girl was perfectly adorable; while she, on her part, was pinching Mrs. Darling's arm and saying: "Oh, mother dear, doesn't he look delightfully *wicked*!"

"Yes, he seems a nice, sardonic fellow," her mother remarked grimly, as they entered their house. "Why did you begin by saying we were engaged to-night? It's the first I've heard of it."

Dolly smiled. "Oh, I made that up, because I thought you were too prompt in accepting. He'll want us all the more if we are stand-offish. Men are like that."

Mrs. Darling sniffed. She was a lazy, plump,

and rather languid little woman; and sometimes she grew impatient at her daughter's ingenious method of dealing with these sorts of situations. She herself had grown more direct in her Yea and Nay: perhaps at the age of forty-five she was a little tired of dissimulation. The world had treated her scurvily; and, having a settled grievance, she was inclined now to take whatever pleasant things were to be had for the asking, without any subtle manœuvring for position.

Her husband had left her when Dolly was five years old, and, so far as she knew, he was now dead. For several years she had bravely maintained herself in a tiny Kensington flat by writing social and theatrical articles for pretentious papers. She had been a purveyor of gossip, a tattle-monger, a dealer in bibble-babble; and she had carried on her trade with an increasing inclination to yawn over it, and a growing consciousness of her daughter's contempt, until the editors who had supported her became aware that her heart was not in her work, and five years ago gave her her *congé*.

Then, with a temporary display of energy, she had followed Dolly's cultured advice, and had established a little business off Sloane Square, which she called "The Purple Shop." Here she sold purple cushions and lamp-shades, poppy-heads dipped in purple paint, poetry-books in purple covers, sketches by Bakst in purple frames, lengths of purple damask, and so forth. But purple went out of fashion, and her once very considerable profits sank to the vanishing point. She introduced other colours, and softer shades of mauve and lilac. She sold a doll

which had mauve hair and naughty black eyes; she took in a stock of bottled new potatoes tinged with a harmless purple liquid, and presented them to the jaded world of fashion as *Pommes de terre pourpres de Tyr*; she even sold brilliant bath-robcs for bored bachelors, with coloured soap to match.

A financial crash followed, and, after a few months spent in dodging her creditors, she heard of this little cottage at Eversfield, and fled to it with her daughter, leaving no address. She was in receipt of a small annual allowance from the estate of a deceased brother, and this she supplemented by writing the monthly fashion article in one of the journals devoted to the world, the flesh and the devil. She wrote under the nom-de-plume of "Countess X"; and her material was obtained by a monthly visit to London and a tour of the leading modistes.

For eighteen months now she had lain low in this nook of the Midlands where Time stood still, and gradually she had ceased to dread the visit of the postman, and had begun to take a languid interest in the cottage. The colour purple no longer set her fat knees knocking together, and lately she had been able even to look up some of her old friends in London and to greet them with the sad, brave smile of a wronged woman.

To Dolly, however, the enforced seclusion had been a sore trial, and there were times when her pretty eyes were red with weeping. She had been utterly bored by the purposeless existence she was called upon to lead; but now the arrival of the new Squire at the manor, which had hardly seen its previous owner during the last year of his life,

had aroused her from her sorrows and had set her heart in a flutter. She liked his strange, swarthy face and his moody eyes, and thought he looked artistic and even intellectual; and she liked his obvious embarrassment at the deference paid to him in this little kingdom which he had inherited.

She spent the afternoon, therefore, in a condition of pleasurable excitement, stitching at the dress she was going to wear and making certain alterations to the shape of the neck.

While she plied her needle, Mrs. Darling sat at the low window overlooking the orchard, and scribbled her monthly article upon a writing-pad resting on her knee. "Here is a charming little conceit I chanced upon in Bond Street t'other day," she wrote. "It is really a tub-time frock; but its success in the drawing-room is likely to be immediate. Organdy ruchings of moonlight blue, and a *soupeçon* of jet cabochons on the corsage. It is named 'Hopes in turmoil.' " And again, "I noticed, too, a crisp little *trotteur* frock, with a nipped-in waist-line hesitating behind a *moyenage* girdle of beige velours delaine. They have called it 'Cupid's Teeth.' Oh, very snappy, I assure you, my dears!"

She smiled lazily as she wrote, but once she sighed so heavily that her daughter asked her if anything were amiss.

"No," she replied. "I was only just wondering whether anybody in their senses could understand the nonsense I am writing. The editor's orders are to make the thing sound French: I should lose my job if I wrote in plain English."

"Oh dear," sighed Dolly, "how tedious all that sort of thing seems! I wonder that you can bother with it."

"I've got to," her mother answered, with irritation. "I shan't be able to give it up till you are married and off my hands."

"Yes, so you are always telling me," said Dolly; and therewith their silence was renewed.

Night had fallen when they set out for the manor, and the lane was intensely dark. They were guided, however, by the light in the window of the lodge at the gates; and from here to their destination they were accompanied by the gardener, who carried a lantern which flung their shadows, like great black monsters, across the high box-hedges flanking the main approach. From the outside the timbered house looked ghostly and forbidding; and by contrast, the front hall which they entered seemed wonderfully well-lit, though only lamps and candles and the flames of the log-fire served for illumination.

Here Jim came to them as they were removing their wraps, and Dolly could see by the expression on his face that her dress had his hearty approval. He led them into the library, where his late uncle's books, arranged upon the high shelves, and the rather heavy furniture, presented a picture of solid dignity; and presently they were ushered into the panelled dining-room, where they sat down at a warmly lit table, under the silent scrutiny of a gallery of dead Tundering-Wests and that of a gaping village housemaid who appeared to be more or less moribund.

The food provided by Jim's thoroughly incom-

petent cook was not a success, and when some rather tough mutton chops had followed a dish of under-boiled cod, which had been preceded by a huge silver tureen of lukewarm soup, their host felt that some words of apology were due to his guests.

"You must try to bear with the menu," he laughed. "This is my cook's first situation. She was recommended to me by Mr. Glenning, the vicar, as a girl who was willing to learn; but it only occurred to me afterwards that that was not much good when there was nobody to teach her."

"You must let me give her a few lessons," said Dolly, at which her mother stared in astonishment, knowing that her daughter understood about as much of cooking as a dumb-waiter.

Yet the girl was not conscious of deception, nor was she aware that she was acting a part, and acting it mainly for her own edification. She pictured herself just now as a splendid little house-wife, and she would have been gravely insulted if her mother had told her that her dream was devoid of reality. In her mind she saw herself as the lady of the manor, quietly, unobtrusively, yet all-wisely, directing its affairs; a sweet smiling Bunty pulling the strings; a little ray of sunshine in the great, grey old house; a source of comfort to her lord which he would not appreciate until she should go away to stay with her mother, whereon he would write to her telling her that since her departure everything had gone wrong.

Throughout her life she had played such parts to herself, her rôles varying according to circumstances. At the Purple Shop she had been the dreamy little artist, destined for higher things, but forced

by cruel poverty to act as assistant saleswoman to a soulless mother, and to smile bravely at the world, though her artist's heart was breaking. When first she had come to Eversfield and had fallen under the spell of the green woods, she had had a severe bout of "Merrie England." She had tripped through the fields in a sun-bonnet, and had begged her mother to buy a harpsichord. She had joined a society of ladies in Oxford who were attempting to revive folk-dancing, and she had footed it nimbly on the sward while the curate played "Hey-diddle-diddle" to them on his flute.

Later she had gone through the nymph-and-fairy phase, and, in the depth of the woods, had let her hair down so that it looked in the sunlight, she supposed, like woven gold. She had danced her way barefooted from tree to tree, sipping the dew from the dog-roses, and singing snatches of strange, wild songs about the "little people," and talking to the birds; and when Farmer Cartwright had caught her at it, she had looked at him, she believed, like a startled fawn.

But now, since the new Squire, with his background of rich lands and ancient tenure, had come into her life, she had played the little helpmate, the goodwife in her dairy, the mistress in her kitchen with whole-hearted enthusiasm. She thought of beginning to collect a book of Simples, in which there would be much mention of Marjoram, Rosemary, Rue and Thyme; sovereign Balsames for Woundes, and Cordiall Tinctures for ye Collicke; receipts for the making of Quince-Wine, or Syllabubs of Apricocks; and so forth. Phrases such as "The little

mistress of the big house," "My lady in her pleasure," or "—in her herbal garden," had been drifting through her head for some time past; and hence her offer to set Jim's cuisine to rights fell naturally from her lips.

Nor was this the only show of interest she displayed in his domestic affairs. After the meal was finished and they were sitting around the fire in the library, she asked Jim to show her the drawing-room, which was not yet in use; and when he was about to lead her to it she made peremptory signs to her mother to refrain from accompanying them.

As she tiptoed down the passage and across the hall at Jim's side, she laid her hand upon his proffered arm, and he was surprised at the lightness of the touch of her fingers. He did not, perhaps, compare it actually to thistledown, which, at the moment, was the description her own mind was fondly giving it; but her painstaking effort to defeat the Newtonian law resulted, as she desired, in an increased consciousness on his part that she was a very fairy-like creature.

The drawing-room was in darkness, and as they entered it she uttered a little squeak of nervousness which went, as it was intended, straight to his manly heart. He put his disengaged hand on her fingers and felt their response: they seemed to be seeking his protection, and his senses were thrilled at the contact. He could have kissed her as she stood.

"Wait a minute," he said, "I'll light the candles."

"No, don't," she answered. "It looks so ghostly and wonderful."

She crept forward into the room, into which only

the reflected light from the hall penetrated, and presently she came to a stand upon the hearth-rug. He followed her, and stood close at her side; one might have harkened to both their hearts beating. Then, boldly, he put his arm in hers and took hold of her hand. It was trembling.

"Why," he said, in surprise, "you're shaking with fright."

"No, it isn't fright," she stammered. . . .

The voice of worldly wisdom whispered to him: "Look out!—this is getting precious close to the danger zone"; and, with a saner impulse, he removed his hand from hers, struck a match, and lit the candle.

"Oh, now you've spoilt it!" she exclaimed, not without irritation, and then added quickly: "The ghosts have vanished."

He held the candle up, and told her to look round the room; but as she did so his own eyes were fixed upon her averted face, and had she turned she would have realized at once that her triumph was nigh.

Chapter VII: THE GAME OF SURVIVAL

UPON the following afternoon the vicar came to call at the manor. Jim had handed over to him as the oldest friend of the late Squire all his uncle's letters, diaries, and other papers, and had asked him to look through them; and, the task being accomplished, he was now bringing them back, carefully docketed and tied up in a large parcel.

As he entered the house there came to his venerable ears the sounds of singing and the twanging of strings.

"Dear me, what is that?" he asked the maid, pausing in the hall.

"Oh, it's only the master a-playing of 'is banjo," the girl explained, smiling at the vicar, who had been her friend since her earliest childhood. "'E often gets took like that, sir. Cook says it's 'is furrin blood."

"But he has no foreign blood," Mr. Glenning told her.

"'E looks a furrin gentleman," she replied, "and 'is ways . . ." She paused, remembering her manners.

The vicar was shown into the drawing-room, and here he found the Squire seated upon the arm of the sofa, his guitar across his knees.

"Hullo, padre!" said Jim. "Excuse the music." He was somewhat abashed at thus being taken un-

awares, for he had little idea that his singing was anything but an infernal noise, intended by Nature to be a vent to the feelings. And these feelings, just now, were of a somewhat violent character, for, though he was not yet aware of his plight, he was in love.

In the early part of the afternoon he had gone for a wandering walk in the woods adjoining the manor, in order to escape a sense of depression which had descended upon him. "It must be this old house," he had said to himself, "with its weight of years. It feels like a trap in which I've been caught, a trap laid by the forefathers to catch the children and teach them their manners." And therewith he had rushed out into the sunshine.

Mr. Glenning smiled indulgently. "I shall have to make use of your voice in church," he said.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Jim laughed, pretending to edge away. "Your choir is bad enough as it is."

The vicar was hurt, and Jim hastened to obliterate his thoughtless words by remarking that he had, not long since, come in from a tour of exploration in the woods, and had found them very pleasant.

"Yes," his visitor replied, "they have grown up nicely. In the Civil War all the trees were felled by Cromwell's men during the siege of Oxford; but one of your ancestors replanted the devastated area after the Restoration, and the place now looks, I dare say, just as it did before that unfortunate quarrel."

The thought did not please Jim. Even the woods, then, which that afternoon seemed to him to be a place of escape from the pall of history, were but

a part of the chain of ancient circumstances which bound the whole estate. Even in their depths he would not be out of hearing of the voice of his forefathers, which told him that they had sowed for posterity and that he must do likewise.

He dismissed the irksome reflection by asking the vicar the nature of the parcel which he had deposited on the table.

Mr. Glenning explained that it contained his uncle's letters, and therewith he unfastened the string, ceremoniously, and revealed a bundle of small packets. "I have been through all these, except this one package," he said, holding up a small parcel, "and I certainly think they are worth keeping, for they display your uncle's noble character in a variety of ways."

"He seems to have been a fine old fellow," Jim remarked.

"He was, indeed," replied the vicar. "He represented all the best in our English life." And therewith he enlarged upon the dead man's virtues, while Jim listened attentively, feeling that the words were intended as an admonition to himself.

At length Mr. Glenning turned to the unopened package. "I have been much exercised in my mind," he said, "as to what to do in regard to this one packet. It is marked, as you see, 'To be destroyed at my death.' Of course, the words do not actually state that the contents are not to be read; but I thought it would be best to consult you first."

"Thanks," replied Jim. "I'll have a look at it some time."

He opened the drawer in the bureau, and bundled

the letters into it, while the vicar watched him, feeling that he was sadly lacking in reverence, and not a little disappointed, perhaps, that the young man had not invited him to deal with the unopened packet.

Later, when Jim was alone once more, he took this mysterious packet from the drawer, and, seating himself upon the sofa beside the fire, cut the string.

The nature of the contents was at once apparent: they were the relics of an affair of the heart, and a glance at the signature of two or three of the letters revealed the fact that the writer was not Jim's aunt. "Ah," said he, with satisfaction, "then the old paragon was human, like all the rest of us."

A perusal of the badly-written pages, however, dispelled the atmosphere of romance which the first short messages of twenty years ago had promised. The story began well enough, so far as he could gather. The lady, whose name was Emily, had evidently lost her heart to her middle-aged lover, and was delighted with the little house he had provided for her in a London suburb. Two or three years later she became a mother, but the child had died, and there was a pathetic document recording her grief. In more recent years the intrigue had developed into an established union; and Emily, now grown complacent, and probably fat, became a secondary spouse and mistress of the old gentleman's alternative home. The tale ended, however, with Emily's marriage, two years ago, at the age of forty, to a young city clerk; and the only romantic features of the close of his uncle's double life was the fact that

he had preserved a little handkerchief of hers and a dead rose.

"Well, Emily," said Jim, aloud, "I wish you luck, wherever you are"; and with that he gently thrust the relics into the flames.

For some time he lay back upon the sofa in the firelight, his arms behind his head, and thought over the story which had been revealed. It seemed, then, that the Eleventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out," was the essential of respectable life. A man could do what he liked, provided that his delinquencies were hidden from his neighbours. Was this sheer hypocrisy?—or was there some principle behind the code? Did not Plato once say: "Every man should exert himself never to appear to any one to be of base metal?" He had read the quotation somewhere. Ought a man's epitaph, then, to be: "He lived nobly, in that he kept up appearances"?—or would it be better frankly to write: "He tried to walk delicately, but the old Adam tripped him up?"

What would the vicar, what would Miss Proudfoote, have said had either of them known of this double life? Where would then have been the beautiful example of a goodly life which his uncle had left behind him as an inspiration to the whole neighbourhood? Was it not better that the secret was kept?

He found no answer to the questions which he thus put to himself; and all that was apparent to him was that decent society was based not upon the truth, but upon the hiding of the truth, and that the more lofty the pretence the more high-principled would be the community. "Truly," he muttered,

"we Anglo-Saxons are called hypocrites; but it is our hypocrisy that keeps us clean!" And with that he returned to his guitar.

A few days later he took Dolly for a walk across the fields. It was an autumnal afternoon, and although the sun shone down from a cloudless sky, there was a chilly haze over the land, which presaged the coming of the first frosts.

"I don't know how I'm going to stand an English winter," he said to her, as they sat to rest upon a stile, under an oak from which the leaves were falling. "Just look at the branches up there. They are nearly bare already." He shuddered.

She looked at him almost reproachfully. "Oh, I'm sorry to hear you say that," she replied. "I love the winter. I am a child of the North, you know. To me the grey skies and the bare trees have a sort of meaning I can't quite explain. They are so . . . so English. Think of the long, dark evenings, when you sit over the hearth, and the fire-light jumps and dances about the walls. Think how cosy one feels when one is tucked up in bed."

He glanced down at her, and she smiled up at him with innocent eyes.

"Think of the snow on the ground," she went on, "and the robins hopping about. You should just see me scampering over the snow in my big country boots, and sliding down the lane. Oh, it's lovely!"

"I shouldn't think my house is very warm," he mused.

"It could be made awfully cosy, I'm sure," she said. "You must have big log fires; and if I were

you I'd buy some screens to put behind the sofas and armchairs around the fire, so that you can have little lamp-lit corners where you can sit as warm as a toast."

"Yes, that's a good idea," he answered.

"Have you got a woolly waistcoat?" she asked, and when he replied in the negative she told him that she would knit one for him at once. "I love knitting," she said; and at the moment she believed that she did.

As they walked on she enlarged upon the delights of winter; and such pleasant pictures did she draw that Jim began to think the coming experience might hold unexpected happiness for him. She managed, somehow, to introduce herself into all the scenes which she sketched, now as a smiling little figure, vibrating with healthy life in the open air, now purring like a warm, sleepy kitten before the fire indoors.

"From what I saw the other night," she told him, "you seem to have an excellent hot-water supply. You'll be able to have beautiful hot baths. . . . I simply love lying in a boiling bath before I go to bed, don't you?"

"I can't say I do," he laughed. "It makes the sheets feel so cold."

"Oh, but you must have them warmed, with a hot-bottle or something," she explained. "When it's very, very cold I sometimes creep into bed with mother, and we cuddle up and warm each other."

Again he glanced down at her quickly, wondering. . . . But her eyes were those of a child.

Presently their path led them through a gate

into a field in which a few cows were grazing; and on seeing them Dolly hesitated.

"You'll think me awfully silly," she faltered, swallowing nervously, "but I'm rather frightened of cows."

He smiled down at her. "Take my arm," he said; and without waiting for her to do so, he linked his own arm in hers and laid his hand over her fingers.

She looked anxiously at a mild-eyed, motherly cow which, weighed down by her full udder, moved towards them slowly. "Oh dear," she whispered, "d'you think that cow is a bull?"

She tugged at his arm, hurrying him forward; and thereat he closed his hand more tightly over hers and drew her close to him. He had always regarded himself as a man of the world, and his intellect had ever poked fun at his sentiments. Yet now, in a situation so blatantly commonplace that he might have been expected to be totally unmoved by it, he was intrigued like a novice. Protecting a maiden from the cows!—it was the A.B.C. of the bumpkin's lovelore; and yet that vulgar old lady, Nature, had once more effectually employed her hackneyed device to his undoing, and here was he rejoicing in his protective strength, thrilled by the beating heart of a frightened girl, as all his ancestors for hundreds of thousands of years had been thrilled before him in the heydays of their adolescence and in the morning of life.

The amiable cow breathed heavily at them from a discreet distance, and then, suddenly hilarious,

lowered her head, kicked out her hind legs, and gambolled beside them for a few yards.

"Oh, oh!" cried Dolly, grabbing at Jim's coat with her disengaged hand. "I'm sure he's going to toss us! Oh, do let's run!"

Jim halted, and held out his hand to the matronly beast. At that moment the jeering sprite which sits in the brain of every Anglo-Saxon, pointing with the finger of mockery at his heroics, was pushed from its throne; and for a brief spell the bravado of primitive, gasconading man—the young Adam cock-a-hoop—was dominant. Jim stepped forward, dragging Dolly with him, and hit the astonished cow sharply across her flank with his hand, whereat she went off at her best speed across the turf.

"Oh, how brave you are!" whispered Dolly; and with that the jesting sprite climbed back upon its throne, and Jim was covered with shame.

"Nonsense!" he said. "You don't suppose cows are put into a field through which there's a right of way unless they are perfectly harmless, do you?"

But pass it off as he might, Nature had played her old, old trick upon him, and in some subtle manner his relationship to Dolly had become more intimate, more alluring; so much so, indeed, that when he said "good-bye" to her he asked to be allowed soon to see her again.

"I want to go in to a lecture in Oxford to-morrow evening," she replied; "but mother has to go to London, and won't be back in time to take me. Would you like to come?"

"What's the lecture about?" he asked.

"'The Emotional Development of the Child,'"

she replied. "I love anything to do with children, and everybody says Professor Robarts is wonderful. He believes that a child's character is formed in the first three or four years of its life, and he thinks all girls should learn just what to do, so that when they have babies of their own . . ." She paused, and a dreamy look came into her eyes: a speaking look which told of what the psycho-analysts call "the mother-urge"; and it made precisely that impression upon Jim's excited senses which it was intended to make.

Wise was the Buddha when, in answer to Ananda's question as to how he should behave in the presence of women, he made the laconic reply: "Keep wide awake."

"Right!" said Jim. "I'll order old Hook's barouche, and drive you in."

She told him that the lecture was to begin at nine, and he left her with the promise that he would call for her in good time.

Alone once more in his house, he could not put the thought of her from his mind. This, perhaps, is not to be wondered at, for he was a hot-blooded gipsy in more than appearance, and she was as pretty and soft a little picture of feminine charm as ever graced an English village. He failed, at any rate, to follow her strategy, and permitted himself to be flustered by it, although there was no deliberate method in her movements, nor did she employ any but those wiles which came almost instinctively to her. Jim, with his experience, ought to have realized that a woman who talks to a man innocently on intimate matters, such as those which had cropped

up without apparent intent in their recent conversation, is, either consciously or unconsciously, Nature's *agent-provocateur*. She is leading his thoughts in that direction which is the goal of her life, according to the ruthless whisperings of Nature, who does not care one snap of the fingers for any but the first member of that blessed trinity, Body, Soul and Spirit. The deft art of suggestion, in the hands of an unscrupulous woman, is dangerous; but in those of a feather-brained little conglomerate of feminine charms and instincts, it is deadly.

These quiet summer and autumn months in the heart of the English countryside had sobered Jim's mind, and his exalted fancy, which had led him at times as it were to hurl himself at the gates of heaven, was gone from him. He told himself that, having inherited this ancient house, it was his business to take to his bosom a wife and helpmate. His primitive manhood had been stirred by her, and his civilized reason justified the riot of his mere senses by the plea of practical advantage and domestic necessity. She was a splendid little housewife, he mused, a quiet little country girl who had learnt her lesson in the school of privation. She was so dainty, so soft, so pretty; she would always be singing and smiling about the house, arranging the flowers, drawing back the chintz curtains to let the sunlight in, dusting and polishing things, and, in the evenings, sitting curled up in an arm-chair knitting him waistcoats. It would be a pleasure to adorn her in pretty dresses and jewels, to take her up to London and show her the world, and to give her the keys of the domestic store-cupboards. So often in

his life he had been afflicted by the sense of his loneliness; but with her at his side that mental malady would be exorcized like a dreary ghost.

With such trivialities, when there is no real love, Nature the Unscrupulous disguises her crude designs, and hides the one thing that interests her in a shower of rice. All men and maidens are pawns in the murderous game of Survival; and whether they go to happiness or to their doom is a matter of utter indifference to the Player. Fortunately, there are souls as well as bodies, and of souls a greater than Nature is Master.

The remarkable fact was that Jim, whose mind was now so full of the conjugal idea, was in no way suited to a domestic life. He was a rover, a self-constituted alien from society; but the original line of his thoughts had been warped by his inheritance of the family property, following as it did so closely upon his experience in the rest-house at Kôm-es-Sultân and his consequent distaste for isolation. He was, as it were, a wild Bedouin tribesman from the desert, sojourning in a village caravanserai; and this little maiden who had sidled up to him had so taken his fancy that the habitation of man had come to seem an agreeable home, and the distant uplands were forgotten.

The grey and dreamy spires of Oxford themselves had wrought a change in him. No man can come under their influence and maintain his mental liberty: they are like a drug, soothing him into quiescence; they are like a poem that drones into the brain the vanity of vigorous action. From the windows of the manor they could be seen rising out of

an almost perpetual haze, and sometimes the breeze carried to this ancient house the ancient sound of their chimes and their tolling. They seemed to preach the blessedness of a quiet, peaceful life—home, marriage, children; the continuous reproduction of unchanging types and the mild obedience to the law of nature.

On the following evening Mr. Hook drove them into Oxford in the old barouche. It was a chilly night, and as the carriage rumbled along the dark lanes Jim and Dolly sat close to one another, with a fur rug spread across their knees.

"I don't think I've ever been to a lecture before in my life," said he, when their destination was reached.

"Nor had I," she replied, "until we came to live at Eversfield. But it seems to be the correct thing to do in Oxford." She amended her words: "I mean, the most interesting thing to do."

The lecture was delivered in the hall of one of the colleges, and the Professor proved to be a dull, reasonable man of the family doctor type, who nevertheless aroused his audience, mostly female, to stern expressions of approval by his declaration that the hand that spans the baby rules the world, and that Waterloo was won across the British mother's lap.

It was aften ten o'clock when they entered the carriage for the return journey; and before they had passed the outskirts of Oxford Dolly began to yawn.

"I went for a tremendous long ramble in the woods to-day," she explained, "and now I can hardly keep my eyes open."

He arranged the rug around her, and made her put her feet up on the opposite seat; then, extending his arm so that it rested behind her back, he told her to take off her hat, lean her head against him, and go to sleep. She settled herself down in this manner, naturally and without any hesitation: she was like a tired child.

In the carriage there was only a glimmer of light from the two lamps outside; and as he sat back somewhat stiffly upon the jolting seat he could but dimly see the mop of her fair hair against his shoulder and the tip of her nose. He felt extraordinarily happy, and there was a tenderness in his attitude towards her which was overwhelming. She seemed so innocent and so trustful; and when for a moment the thought entered his head that there was perhaps some half-conscious artifice in her behaviour, he dismissed the suggestion with resentment.

The carriage rolled on, and in the darkness he dreamt his dream just as all young men have dreamt it since the world began. It seemed clear to him, now, that he had missed the best of life, because he had seldom had an intimate comrade with whom to share his experiences; for, as Seneca said, "the possession of no good thing is pleasant without a companion." In the days of his wanderings, of course, a companion had been out of the question; but now his travels were done, and there were no hardships to deter him from marriage. He recalled the words of the Caliph Omar which an Egyptian had once quoted to him: "After the Faith, no blessing is equal to a good wife"; and he remembered

something in the Bible about her price being far above rubies.

Yet such thoughts as these were but the feeble efforts of the mind to keep pace with the senses. He was like a drunken man who speaks slowly and distinctly to prove that he is not drunk. Had his senses permitted him to be honest with himself he would have admitted that consideration of the advantages of marriage had little influence upon him just now: he wanted Dolly for his own; he wanted to put his arms about her and to kiss her here and now while she slept; he wanted to pull her hair down so that it should tumble about his fingers; he wanted to feel her heart beating under his hand, to hear the sigh of her breath close to his ear. . . .

He bent his head down so that his lips came close to her forehead, and as he did so she raised her face. He was too deeply bewitched to realize that, far from being tired, she was at that moment a conquering woman, working at high pressure, acutely aware of his every movement, her nerves and senses strained to win that which she so greatly desired.

For some minutes he remained abnormally still, a little shy perhaps, perhaps desiring to linger upon the wonderful moment like a child agape at the threshold of a circus. Presently she sat up.

"Why, I've been asleep!" she exclaimed. "Are we nearly home?"

"Yes," he answered, without rousing himself from his dream.

She raised her hands to her head; she did something with her fingers which, in the dim light, he

could not see; and a moment later he felt her hair tumbling about his hand.

"Oh dear, my hair's fallen down," she said.

He drew in his breath sharply. "Don't wake up!" he gasped. "Put your head down again where it was."

With a sigh of contentment she did as she was told; but now his arms were around her, and all his ten fingers were buried in her hair. He could just discern her eyes looking up at him with a sort of dismay in them; he could see her mouth a little open. He bent down and kissed her lips.

Chapter VIII: MARRIAGE

AN old proverb says that marriages are made in heaven. It is one of those ridiculous utterances born of primitive fatalism: it is akin to the statement that afflictions are sent by God for His inscrutable purpose. Actually, marriages in their material aspect are made by soulless Nature, who plots and plans for nothing else, and who cares for nothing else except the production of the next generation.

One cannot blame Dolly for using the less worthy arts of her sex to capture the man she wanted. One cannot think ill of Jim for having been betrayed by his senses into an alliance wherein there was little hope of happiness. Nature has strewn the whole world with her traps; she tricks and inveigles all young men and women with these dreams and promises of joy; she schemes and intrigues and conspires for one purpose, and one purpose only; and in so doing she has no more thought of that spiritual union, which is the only sort of marriage made in heaven, than she has when she sends the pollen from one flower to the next upon the wings of the bees.

Human beings in the spring-time of life are the dupes of Nature's heedless *joie de vivre*, and fortunate are those who can take her animal pranks in good part and avoid getting hurt. Her victims are swayed and tossed about by yearnings and desires, passions and jealousies, tremendous joys and

desperate sorrows: because she is everywhere at work upon the sole occupation which interests her—her scheme of racial survival.

The marvel is that so many marriages are happy, considering that youths and maidens are flung together, haphazard, by mighty forces, upon the irresistibility of which the whole existence of the race depends. Well does Nature know that if once men and women mastered their yearnings, if once men should fail to hunt and women to entice, the game would be lost, and the human race would become extinct.

During the following week Jim and Dolly saw each other every day; but, though their intimacy developed, Jim made no definite proposal of marriage. He was a lazy fellow. It was as though he preferred to drift into that state without undergoing the ordeal of the social formalities. He seemed to be carried along by circumstances, yet he dreaded what may be termed the business side of the matter.

At length Dolly brought matters to a point in her characteristic manner of assumed ingenuousness. "I think, dear," she said, "we had better tell mother about it now, hadn't we? She will be so hurt if she finds that we've been leaving her out of our happiness."

Jim made no protest. He felt rather stupid, and the thought of going to Mrs. Darling, hand-in-hand with Dolly, seemed to him to be positively frightening in its crudity. It would be like walking straight into a trap. He would have preferred to slip off to a registry-office, and to see no friend or relative for a year afterwards.

The ordeal, however, proved to be less painful than he had anticipated, thanks to the tact displayed by Mrs. Darling. When Dolly came into the room at the cottage, triumphantly leading in her captive, the elder woman at once checked any utterance which was about to be made by declaring that Jim had just arrived in time to advise her in the choice of a new chintz for her chairs.

"Dolly, dear," she said, "run upstairs and fetch me that book of patterns, will you?" And as soon as the girl had left the room she added: "I wonder whether your taste will agree with Dolly's?"

"I expect so," he replied, significantly.

"I hope so, for your sake," she smiled; and then, turning confidentially to him, she whispered: "Tell me quickly, before she comes back: do you seriously want to marry her, or shall I help you to get out of it?"

Jim was completely startled, and stammered the beginning of an incoherent reply.

She interrupted him, putting a plump hand on his shoulder. "It has been clear to me for some time that Dolly is desperately in love with you, and I know she has brought you here to settle the thing. But I'm a woman of the world, my dear boy: I don't want to rush you into anything you don't intend; for the fact is, I like you very much indeed."

Jim made the only possible reply. "But," he said with conviction, "I want to marry her. I've come to ask you. May I?"

Mrs. Darling looked at him intently. "You will have to manage her," she told him. "She is very young and rather full of absurdities, you know. But

you have knocked about the world: I should think you would be able to get the best out of her, and, anyhow, I shall feel she is in good hands."

When the girl returned, after a somewhat prolonged absence, her mother looked almost casually at her. "Dolly," she said, "I don't know if you are aware of it, but you are engaged to be married."

Thereat the three of them laughed happily, and the rest was plain sailing.

Later that day Dolly strolled arm-in-arm with Jim around the grounds of the manor, looking about her with an air of proprietorship which he found very fascinating. The linking of their lives and their belongings seemed to him like a delightful game.

"I do like your mother," he said. "She's a real good sort."

Dolly looked up at him quickly. "Poor mother!" she replied. "I don't know what we can do with her. She won't like leaving Eversfield."

"Oh, why should she go?" Jim asked.

"It would never do for her to stay," Dolly answered firmly. "Mothers-in-law are always in the way, however nice they are. I'm not going to risk her getting on your nerves." She looked at him with an expression like that of a wise child.

"Well, we'll rent a flat for her in London," he suggested, "and I'll give her the cottage, too, so that she can come down to it sometimes."

Dolly shook her head. "No," she said coldly, "she has enough money to keep herself." His sentiments in regard to her mother had perhaps ruffled her somewhat, and an expression had passed over

her face which she hoped he had not seen. She endeavoured, therefore, to turn his thoughts to more intimate matters. "I should hate mother to be a burden to you," she went on. "It'll be bad enough for you to have to buy all my clothes."

"I shall love it," he replied, with enthusiasm.

"Ah, you don't know how expensive they are," she hesitated. "You see, it isn't only what shows on top"—her voice died down to a luscious whisper—"it's all the things underneath as well. Women's clothes are rather wonderful, you know."

She smiled shyly, and at that moment their marriage was to him a thing most fervently to be desired.

Events moved quickly, and it was decided that the engagement should not be of long duration. The news of the coming wedding caused a great stir in the village; and when the banns were read in the little church all eyes were turned upon them as they sat, he in the Squire's pew, and she with her mother near by. They formed a curious contrast in type: she, with her fair hair, her child-like face, and her dainty little figure; and he with his swarthy complexion, his dark, restless eyes, and his rather untidy clothes. People wondered whether they would be happy, and the general opinion was that the little lamb had fallen into the power of a wolf. The village, in fact, had not taken kindly to the new Squire and his "foreign" ways; and Mrs. Spooner, the doctor's wife, had voiced the general opinion by nicknaming him "Black Rupert."

The weeks passed by rapidly, and soon Christmas was upon them. The wedding was fixed for the end of January, and during that month Jim caused

various alterations to be made in the furnishing of the manor, in accordance with Dolly's wishes, for she held very decided views in this regard, and did not agree with his retention of so many of the mid-Victorian features in the drawing-room and the bedrooms. He himself had intended at first to be rid of most of these things, but later he had begun to feel, as Mr. Beadle had said he would, that he owed a certain homage to the past.

"Men don't understand about these things," Dolly said to him, patting his face; "but, if you want to please me, you'll let me make a list of the pieces of furniture that ought to be got rid of and sell them."

The consequence was that a van-load left the manor a few days later, and Miss Proudfoote and the vicar held one another's hand as it passed, and choked with every understandable emotion, while Mr. and Mrs. Longarm wept openly at the gates.

The wedding-day at length arrived, and the ceremony proved a very trying ordeal to Jim; for Mr. Glenning had organized the village demonstrations of goodwill, with the result that the school children, blue with cold, were lined up at the church door, the pews inside were packed with uncomfortably-dressed yokels with burnished faces and creaking boots, and a great deal of rice was thrown as the happy couple left the building.

Afterwards there was a reception at the Darling's cottage; and Jim, wearing a tail-coat and a stiff collar for the first time in his life, suffered torments which were not entirely ended by a later change into a brand-new suit of grey tweed. Throughout this trying time Mrs. Darling, fat and flushed,

proved to be his comforter and his stand-by; and it was through her good offices that the hired car, which was to take them to the railway station at Oxford, claimed them an hour too early.

Dolly, who had looked like an angel of Zion in her wedding dress, appeared, in her travelling costume, like a dryad of the Bois de Boulogne, and Jim, who had seen something of her trousseau, turned to Mrs. Darling in rapture.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "You have rigged Dolly out wonderfully! I've never seen such clothes."

Mrs. Darling smiled. "I believe in pretty dresses," she said, with fervent conviction. "They tend to virtue. I believe that when the respectable women of England took to wearing what were called indecent clothes, they struck their first effective blow at the power of Piccadilly. Has it never occurred to you that young peers have almost ceased to marry chorus girls now that peer's daughters dress like leading ladies?"

The honeymoon was spent upon the Riviera, and here it was that Jim realized for the first time the exactions of marriage. This exquisitely costumed little wife of his could not be taken to the kind of inn which he had been accustomed to patronize, and he was therefore obliged to endure all the discomforts of fashionable hotel life, with its nerve-racking corollaries—the jabbering crowds, the perspiring, stiff-shirted diners, the clatter, bustle and perplexity, terminating in each case in the dreaded crisis of gratuity-giving and escape.

With all his Bedouin heart he loathed this sort of thing, and, had he not been the slave of love,

he would have rebelled against it at once. Dolly saw his distress, but only added to it by her superior efforts to train him in the way in which he should go; and it was with a sigh of profound relief that at length he found himself in Eversfield once more, when the first buds of spring were powdering the trees with green, and the early daffodils were opening to the growing warmth of the sun.

Jim's work in connection with the estate was not onerous, but he very soon found that various small matters had constantly to be seen to, and often they were the cause of annoyance. Rents were not always paid promptly, and if his agent pressed for them the tenants regarded Jim, who knew nothing about it, as stern and exacting. Mr. Merrivall held his lease of Rose Cottage on terms which provided that the tenant should be responsible for all interior repairs; and now he announced that the kitchen boiler was worn out, and the question had to be decided as to whether a boiler was an interior or a structural fitting. Some eighty acres were farmed by Mr. Hopkins on a sharing agreement, that is to say, Jim took a part of the profits in lieu of rent; but this sort of arrangement is always fruitful of disputes, and, in the case in question, the fact that Jim instinctively mistrusted Farmer Hopkins, and Farmer Hopkins mistrusted Jim, led at once to friction.

Matters came to a head in the early summer. The farmer had decided to remove the remains of a last year's hayrick from the field where it stood to a shed near his stable, and, during the process, he attempted to make a short-cut by drawing his

heavily-loaded wagon over a disused bridge which spanned a ditch. The bridge, however, collapsed under the weight, and the wagon was wrecked.

The farmer thereupon demanded compensation from Jim, since the latter was the owner of the bridge and therefore responsible for it. Jim, however, replied that that road had been closed for many years to all but pedestrians, and, if anything, the farmer ought to pay for the mending of the bridge. Mr. Hopkins then declared that he was going to law, and, in the meantime, he aired his grievances nightly at the "Green Man," the village public-house.

The trouble simmered for a time, and then, one morning, the two men met by chance at the scene of the disaster. A wordy argument followed, and Farmer Hopkins, with a mouthful of oaths, repeated his determination to go to law, whereupon Jim lost his temper.

"Look here!" he said. "I don't know anything about your blasted law, but I do know when I'm being imposed upon. If you mention the word 'law' to me again I'll put my fist through your face."

"Two can play at that game," exclaimed the farmer, red with anger.

"Very well, then, come on!" cried Jim, impulsively, and, pulling off his coat and tossing his hat aside, he began to roll up his shirt-sleeves.

Mr. Hopkins was a bigger and heavier man than the Squire, but Jim had the advantage of him in age, being some five years younger, and they were therefore very well matched. The farmer however, did not wish to fight, and, indeed, was so dis-

concerted at the prospect that he stood staring at Jim's lithe, wild figure like a puzzled bull.

"Take your coat off!" Jim shouted. "We'll have this matter out now. Put up your fists!"

The farmer thereupon dragged off his coat, and a moment later the two men were at it hammer and tongs, Mr. Hopkins' fists swinging like a windmill, and Jim, with more skill, parrying the blows and sending right and left to his opponent's body with good effect. The first bout was ended by Jim dodging a terrific right and returning his left to the farmer's jaw, thereby sending him to the ground.

As he rose to his feet Jim shouted at him: "Well, will you now mend your own damned cart and let me mend my bridge?—or do you want to go on?"

For answer the infuriated Mr. Hopkins charged at him, and, breaking his guard, sent his fist into Jim's eye; but he omitted to follow up the advantage with his idle left, and, in consequence, received an exactly similar blow upon his own blood-shot optic.

It was at this moment that a scream was heard, and Dolly appeared from behind a hedge, a curious habit of hers, that of always wishing to know what her husband was doing, having led her to follow him into the fields.

"James!" she cried in horror—ever since their marriage she had called him "James"—"What are you doing? Mr. Hopkins!—are you both mad?"

"Pretty mad," replied Jim.

"Call yourself a gentleman!" roared the farmer, holding his hand to his eye.

"Oh, please, please!" Dolly entreated. "Go home, Mr. Hopkins, before he kills you! James,

you ought to be ashamed of yourself, fighting like a common man. You have disgraced me!"

Jim, who was recovering his coat, looked up at her out of his one serviceable eye in astonishment. Then, turning to his opponent, he said: "We'll finish this some other time, if you want to."

He then walked off the field of battle, his coat slung across his shoulder and his dark hair falling over his forehead, while Mr. Hopkins sat down upon the stump of a tree and spat the blood out of his mouth.

For many days thereafter Dolly would hardly speak to her disfigured husband, except to tell him, when he walked abroad with his blackened eye, that he had no shame. Farmer Hopkins, however, mended his wagon in time, and Jim mended his bridge; and there, save for much village head-shaking at the "Green Man" and melancholy talk at the vicarage, the matter ended. It was a regrettable affair, and the general opinion in the village was that "Black Rupert" was a man to be avoided. Miss Proudfoote, in fact, would hardly bow to him when next she passed him in the lane; and even Mr. Glenning, who quarrelled with no man, gazed at him, in church on the following Sunday, with an expression of deep reproof upon his venerable face.

It was after this painful incident that Jim formed the habit of going for long rambling walks by himself, or of wandering deep into the woods near the manor. Sometimes he would sit for hours upon a stile in the fields, sucking a straw and staring vacantly into the distance at the misty towers and spires of the ancient University, or lie in the grass, gazing

up at the sky, listening to the far-off bells, his arms behind his head. Sometimes he would take a book from his uncle's library—some eighteenth-century romance, or a volume of Elizabethan poetry—and go with it into the woods, there to remain for a whole afternoon, reading in it or in the book of Nature.

These woods had a curious effect upon him, and entering them seemed to be like finding sanctuary. It was not that his life, at this period, was altogether unhappy: his heart was full of tenderness towards Dolly, and, if her behaviour was beginning to disappoint him, his attitude was at first but one of vague disquietude. Yet here amongst the understanding trees he felt that he was taking refuge from some menace which he could not define; and at times he wondered whether the sensation was due to a mental throw-back to some outlawed ancestor who had roamed the merry greenwood, in the manner of Adam Bell and Clim of the Clough and William Cloudesley in the ancient ballads of the North of England.

He was conscious of a decided sense of failure and he felt that he was a useless individual. To a limited extent he used his brains and his pen in writing the verses which always amused him, but he rarely finished any such piece of work, and seldom composed a poem of any considerable length.

His character was not of the kind which would be likely to appeal to the stay-at-home Englishman. He did not play golf, and though as a youth he had been fond of cricket and tennis, his wandering life had given him no opportunities of maintaining his skill in these games, and now it was too late to

begin again. He was not particularly interested in horseflesh, and he had no mechanical turn which might vent itself in motoring. His habits were modest and temperate; he preferred pitch-and-toss or "shove-ha'penny" to bridge; and he was a poor judge of port wine. He was sociable where the company was to his taste, but neither his neighbours at and around Eversfield, nor the professors at Oxford, were congenial to him. When there were visitors to the manor he was generally not able to be found; and when he was obliged to accompany his wife to the houses of other people, he was conscious that her eyes were upon him anxiously, lest he should show himself for what he was—a rebel and an outlaw.

On one occasion the vicar persuaded him to sing and play his guitar at a village concert; but the result was disastrous, and the invitation was never repeated. He chose to sing them Kipling's "Mandalay"; but the pathos and the romance of the rough words were lost upon his stolid audience, to whom there was no meaning in the picture of the mist on the rice-fields and the sunshine on the palms, nor sense in the contrasting description of the "blasted Henglish drizzle" and the housemaids with beefy faces and grubby hands.

He himself was carried away by the words, and he sang with fervour:—

Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the
worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments, an' a man can
raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would
be—
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea.

He did not see Dolly's frowns, nor the pained expression upon the vicar's face, nor yet the smirks of the yokels; and when the song was ended he came suddenly back to earth, as it were, and was abashed at the feebleness of the applause.

Later, as he left the hall, he was stopped outside the door by a disreputable, red-haired creature, nicknamed "Smiley-face," who was often spoken of as the village idiot. He grinned at Jim and touched his forelock.

"Thank 'e, sir," he said, "for that there song. My, you do sing beautiful, sir!"

"I'm glad you liked it," Jim answered.

"It was just like dreamin'," Smiley-face muttered.

Jim looked at him quickly, and felt almost as though he had found a friend. He himself had been dreaming as he sang, and here, at any rate, was one man who had dreamed with him—and they called him the village idiot!

Chapter IX: IN THE WOODS

AS in the case of so many unions in which mutual attraction of a quite superficial nature has been mistaken for love, the marriage of Jim and Dolly was a complete disaster. Disquietude began to make itself felt within a few weeks, but many months elapsed before Jim faced the situation without any further attempt at self-deception. The revelation that he had nothing to say to his wife, no thought to exchange with her, had come to him early. At first he had tried to believe that it was due to some sort of natural reticence in both their natures; and one day, chancing to open a volume of the poems of Matthew Arnold which Dolly had placed upon an occasional table in the drawing-room (for the look of the thing) he had found some consolation in the following lines:—

Alas, is even Love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?
I knew the mass of men conceal'd
Their thoughts. . . .
But we, my love—does a like spell benumb
Our hearts, our voices? Must we, too, be dumb?

Other lovers, then, had experienced that blank-wall feeling: it was just human nature.

But soon he began to realize that in this case the trouble was more serious. He had nothing

to say to her. She did not understand him, nor call forth his confidences.

For months he had struggled against the consciousness that he had made a fatal mistake; but at length the horror of his marriage, of his inheritance, and of society in general as he saw it here in England, became altogether too large a presence to hide itself in the dark corners of his mind. It came out of the shadows and confronted him in the daylight of his heart—an ugly, menacing figure, towering above him, threatening him, arguing with him, whithersoever he went. He attributed features to it, and visualized it so that it took definite shape. It had a lewd eye which winked at him; it had a ponderous, fat body, straining at the buttons of the black clothing of respectability; it had heavy, flabby hands which stroked him as though urging him to accept its companionship. It was his gaoler, and it wanted to be friends with him.

At length one autumn day, while he was sitting in the woods among the falling leaves, he turned his inward eyes with ferocious energy upon the monster, and set his mind to a full study of the situation it personified.

In the first place, Dolly held views in regard to the position and status of wife which offended Jim's every ideal. She was firmly convinced that marriage was, first and foremost, designed by God for the purpose of producing in the male creature a disinclination for romance. It involved a mutual duty, a routine: the wife had functions to perform with condescension, the husband had recurrent requirements to be indulged in order that his life might pursue its

way with the least possible excitement. The whole thing was an ordained and prescriptive business, like a soldier's drill or a patient's diet; nor did she seem to realize that there was no room for real love in her conception of their relationship, no sweet enchantment, no exaltation.

Then, again, he was very much disappointed that Dolly had no wish to have a child of her own. She had explained to him early in their married life how her doctor had told her there would be the greatest possible danger for her in motherhood; but it had not taken Jim long to see that a combination of fear, selfishness and vanity were the true causes of her disinclination to maternity. She was always afraid of pain and in dread of death; she always thought first of her own comfort; and she was vain of her youthful figure.

These two facts, that she asserted herself as his wife and that she shunned parenthood, combined to produce a condition of affairs which offended Jim's every instinct. In these matters men are so often more fastidious than women, though the popular pretence is to the contrary; and in the case of this unfortunate marriage there was an appalling contrast between the crudity of the angel-faced little wife and the delicacy of the hardy husband.

A further trouble was that she regarded marriage as a duality incompatible with solitude or with any but the most temporary separation. One would have thought that she had based her interpretation of the conjugal state upon some memory of the Siamese Twins. When Jim was writing verses in the study—an occupation which, by the way, she

endeavoured to discourage—she would also want to write there; when he was entertaining a male friend she would enter the room, and refuse to budge—not because she liked the visitor, but because she must needs assert her standing as wife and as partner of all her husband's amusements; when he went into Oxford or up to London she would insist on going too; even when he was talking to the gardener she would come up behind him, slip her arm through his, and immediately enter the conversation.

At first, when he used to tell her that he was going alone into Oxford to have a drink and a chat in the public room at one of the hotels, she would burst into tears, or take offence less liquid but more devastating. Later she accused him of an intrigue with a barmaid, and went into tantrums when in desperation he replied: "No such luck." For the sake of peace he found it necessary at last to give up all such excursions except when they were unavoidable, and gradually his life had become that of a prisoner.

She carried this assertion of her wifely rights to galling and intolerable lengths. She would look over his shoulder when he was writing letters, and would be offended if he did not let her do so, or if he withheld the letters he received. On two or three occasions she had come to him, smiling innocently, and had handed him some opened envelope, and had said: "I'm so sorry, dear; I opened this by mistake. I thought it was for me."

He could keep nothing from her prying eyes; and yet, in contrast to this curiosity, she showed no interest whatsoever in his life previous to his

marriage, a fact which indicated clearly enough that her concern was solely in regard to *her* relationship with him, and was not prompted by any desire to enter into his personality. At first he had wanted to tell her of his early wanderings; but she had been bored, or even shocked, by his narrations, and had told him that his adventures did not sound very "nice." Thus, though now she watched his every movement, she had no idea of his early travels, nor knew, except vaguely, what lands he had dwelt in, nor was she aware that in those days he had passed under the name of Easton.

Now Jim enjoyed telling a story: he was, in fact, a very interesting and vivacious raconteur; and he felt, at first, sad disappointment that his roaming life should be regarded as a subject too dull or too unrespectable for narration. "It's a funny thing," he once said to himself, "but that girl, Monimé, at Alexandria knows far more about me than my own wife, and I only knew her for a few hours!"

And then her poses and affectations! He discovered early in their married life that her offers to teach the cook her business, or to knit him waistcoats, were entirely fraudulent. She had none of the domestic virtues—a fact which only troubled him because she persisted in seeing herself in the rôle of practical housewife: he had no wish for her to be a cook or a sewing woman. She went through a phase in which she pictured herself as a sun-bonneted poultry-farmer. She bought a number of Rhode Island Reds and Buff Orpingtons; she caused elaborate hen-houses to be set up; and she subscribed to various poultry fanciers' journals. But

it was not many weeks before the pens were derelict and their occupants gone. For some months she played the part of the Lady Bountiful to the village, and might have been seen tripping lown the lanes to visit the aged cottagers, a basket on her arm. This occupation, however, soon began to pall, and her apostacy was marked by a gradual abandonment of the job to the servants. Later she had attached herself to the High Church party in Oxford, and had added new horrors to the state of wedlock by regarding it as a mystic sacrament. . . .

The most recent of her phases had followed on from this. She had asked Jim to allow her to bring to the house the orphaned children of a distant relative of her mother's: two little girls, aged four and five. "It will be so sweet," she had said, "to hear their merry laughter echoing about this old house. It will be some compensation for my great sorrow in not being allowed to have babies of my own."

Jim had readily consented, for he was very fond of children; and soon the mites had arrived, very shy and tearful at first, but presently well content with their lot. Dolly declared that no nurse would be necessary, as she would delight in attending to them herself, and for two weeks she had played the little mother with diminishing enthusiasm. But the day speedily came when help was found to be necessary, and now a good-natured nursery-governess was installed at the manor.

Having thus regained her leisure, she bought a notebook, and labelling it "The Tiny Tot's Treasury," spent several mornings in dividing the pages

into sections under elaborate headings written in a large round hand. Jim chanced upon this book one day—it lay open upon a table—and two section-headings caught his eye. They read:—

Hands, games with
“Can you keep a secret?”
“Pat-a-cake.”

Toes, games with
“This little pig went to market.”

The book was abandoned within a week or two; but the recollection of its futility, its pose, remained in Jim's memory for many a day.

The presence of these two little girls, while being a considerable pleasure to Jim in itself, had been the means of irritating him still further in regard to his wife. Sometimes, when she remembered it, she would go up to the nursery to bid them “good-night” and to hear their prayers; and when he accompanied her upon this mission his spontaneous heart was shocked to notice how her attitude towards them was dictated solely by the picture in her own mind which represented herself as the ideal mother. There was a long mirror in the nursery, and, as she caressed the two children, her eyes were fixed upon her own reflection as though the vision pleased her profoundly.

And then, only a few days ago, a significant occurrence had taken place which had led to a painful scene between Dolly and himself. One morning at breakfast the elder of the two little girls had told him that she had had an “awfully awful” dream.

“It was all about babies,” she had said, and then, pausing shyly, she had added: “But I mustn't tell you about it, because it's very naughty.”

He was alone in the room with them at the time, and he had questioned the round-eyed little girl, and had eventually extracted from her the startling information that on the previous evening Dolly had been telling them "how babies grew," but had warned them that it would be naughty to talk about it.

He was furious, and when his wife came downstairs at mid-morning—she always had her breakfast in bed—he had caught hold of her arm and had asked her what on earth she meant by talking in this manner to two infants of four and five years of age.

"It's not your business," was the reply. "You must trust a woman's instinct to know when to reveal things to little girls."

"Oh, rot!" he had answered, angrily; and suddenly he had put into hot and scornful words his interpretation of Dolly's untimely action. "The fact is, your motive is never disinterested. You are always picturing yourself in one rôle or another. You didn't even think what sort of impression you were making on the minds of those little girls: you were only play-acting for your own edification."

"I don't understand you," she had stammered, shocked and frightened.

"You pictured yourself," he went on, with bitter sarcasm, "as the sweet and wise mother revealing to the wide-eyed little girls the great secrets of Nature. I suppose some Oxford ass has been lecturing to a lot of you silly women about the duties of motherhood, and you at once built up your foolish picture, and thought it would make a charming scene

—the gentle mother, the two little babies at your knee, their lisping questions and your pure, sweet answer, telling them the wonderful vocation of womanhood. And then you went upstairs and forced it on the poor little souls, just to gratify your vanity; but afterwards you were frightened at what you had done, and told them they mustn't speak about it, because it was naughty. Naughty!—Good God! —That one word has already sown the seed of corruption in their minds. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

He had not waited for her reply, but had left the room, and had gone with clenched fists into the woods, his usual refuge, sick at heart, and appalled that his life was linked to such a sham thing as his wife had proved herself to be.

He had longed to get away from her, away from Eversfield, back to his beloved high roads once more, out of this evil stagnation; and all the while the ponderous, black-coated creature of his imagination had leered at him and stroked him.

When next he saw his wife he had found her in the rock-garden playing a game with the two children, as though she were determined to make him realize her ability to enter into their mental outlook. "We are playing a game of fairies," she had told him, evidently not desiring to keep up the quarrel. "All the flowers are enchanted people, and the rockery there is an ogre's castle. We're having a lovely time."

The two little girls actually were standing staring in front of them, utterly bored; for the ability to play with children is a delicate art in which few

"grown-ups" are at ease. But Dolly, as she crouched upon the ground, was not concerned with anybody save herself, and the game was designed for the applause of her inward audience and for the eye of her husband, and not at all for the entertainment of her charges.

"Well, when you've finished I want you to come and help me tidy my writing-table and tear things up," he had said to the children; and thereat they had asked Dolly whether they might please go now, and had pranced into the house at his side, leaving her sighing in the rock-garden.

Thoughts and memories such as these paraded before his mind's eye as he sat upon a fallen tree trunk, deep in the woods. The afternoon was warm and still, and the leaves which fell one by one from the surrounding trees seemed to drop from the branches deliberately, as though each were answering an individual call of the earth. Sometimes his heavy thoughts were interrupted by the shrill note of a bird, and once there was a startled scurry amongst the undergrowth as a rabbit observed him and went bounding away.

The wood was not very extensive, but, with the surrounding fields, it afforded a certain amount of shooting; and one of Jim's tenants, Pegett by name, who lived in a cottage in a clearing at the far side, acted as a sort of gamekeeper, his house being given to him free of rent in return for his services.

The sun had set, and the haze of a windless twilight had gathered in the distant spaces between the trees when at length Jim rose to return to the manor. His ruminations had led him to no very

definite conclusion, save only that he had made a horrible mistake, and that he must adjust his life to this glaring fact, even though he offend Dolly's dignity in the process.

As he stood for a moment in silence, stretching his arms like one awaking from sleep, he was suddenly aware of the sound of cracking twigs and rustling leaves, and, looking in the direction from which it came, he caught sight of the red-faced Pegett, the gamekeeper, emerging, gun in hand, from behind a group of tree-trunks. The man ran forward, and then, recognizing him, paused and touched his cap.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, breathing heavily, "I'm after that there poaching thief, Smiley-face. 'E's at it again: I seen 'im slip in with 'is tackle. I seen 'im from my window."

"He's not been this way," Jim assured him. "I've been sitting here a long time."

"'E's a clever 'un!" Pegett muttered, "but I'll get 'im one 'o these days, sir, I will; and I'll put a barrel o' shot into 'is legs."

"He's not quite right in his head, is he?" Jim asked.

"Oh, 'e's wise enough," the man replied; "wise enough to get 'is dinner off of your rabbits, sir. That's been 'is game since 'e were no more'n a lad. And never done an honest day's work in 'is life."

Smiley-face, as has been said, was generally considered to be half-witted; but on the few occasions on which Jim had spoken to him he had answered intelligently enough, not to say cheekily, though there was something most uncanny about his continuous smile. Nobody seemed to know exactly how

he lived. He slept in a garret in a lonely cottage belonging to an aged and witch-like woman known as old Jenny, and it was to be presumed that he did odd jobs for her in return for his keep; but she herself was a mysterious soul, not inclined to waste words on the passer-by, and her cottage, which stood midway between Eversfield and the neighbouring village of Bedley-Sutton, was superstitiously shunned by the inhabitants of both places.

Pegett was eager to track down the malefactor, and presently he disappeared among the trees, moving like a burlesque of a Red Indian, and actually making sufficient noise to rouse the woods for a hundred yards around. Jim, meanwhile, made his way towards the manor, walking quietly upon the moss-covered path, and pausing every now and then to listen to the distant commotion caused by the gamekeeper's efforts to break a silent way through the brittle twigs and crisp, dead leaves.

He had just sighted the gate which led from the wood to the lower part of the garden of the manor when his eye was attracted by the swaying of the upper branch of an oak a short distance from the path. He paused, wondering what had caused the movement, which had sent a shower of leaves to the ground, and to his surprise he presently discerned a man's foot resting upon it, the remainder of his body being hidden behind the broad trunk. He guessed immediately that he had chanced upon, and treed, Smiley-face, and, having a fellow feeling for the poacher, he called out to him, quite good-naturedly, to come down. He received no answer, however; and going therefore to the foot of the oak,

he looked up at the man, who was now hardly concealed, and again addressed him.

"It's no good pretending to be a woodpecker, Smiley-face," he said. "Come down at once, or I'll shy a stone at you."

Smiley-face was a youngish man, with dirty red hair, puckered pink skin, and a smile which extended from ear to ear. His nose was snub, and his eyes were like two sparkling little blue beads, cunning and merry. He now thrust this surprising countenance forward over the top of a branch, and stared down at Jim with an expression of intense relief.

"Lordee!—it's the Squire," he muttered. "You did give I a fright, sir: I thought it was Mr. Pegett with 'is gun. Shoot I dead, 'e said he would. 'E said it to my face, up yonder at the Devil's Cross-roads: would you believe it?"

"Yes, he told me he'd let you have an ounce of small shot, but only in the legs of course."

"Oo!" said Smiley-face. "And me that tender, what with thorn and nettle and the midges."

"You'd better come down," Jim advised. "He's after you now; and you can see I myself haven't got my gun with me, or I'd pepper you too."

The man descended the tree, talking incoherently as he swung from branch to branch. Presently he dropped to the ground from one of the lower boughs, and stood grinning before Jim, a dirty, ragged creature without a point to commend him.

"Fairly cotched I am," he declared. "But I knows a gen'l'man when I sees un. I knows when it's safe and when it baint. If I was to run now, d'you reckon you could catch I, sir?"

For answer Jim's lean arm shot out, and his

hand gripped hold of the handkerchief knotted around the man's neck. Smiley-face swung his fist round, but the blow missed; and Jim, who had learnt a trick or two from a little Jap in California, tripped him up with ease, and the next moment was kneeling upon his chest.

"What about that, Smiley-face?" he asked, laughing.

"Wonderful!" replied the poacher. "I should never ha' thought it."

Jim rose to his feet. "Get up," he said, "and let me hear what you've got to say for yourself." Then, as the man did as he was bid, he added: "If Pegett comes along, you can slip through that gate and across my garden. Nobody will see you."

Smiley-face grinned. "Thank'ee kindly, sir," he said, touching his forelock. "I knew you was a kind gen'l'man."

"Oh, cut that out," Jim replied sharply. "What d'you mean by going after my rabbits?"

"O Lordee! Be they yours?" Smiley-face scratched his red head.

"You know very well they are. I own this place, don't I?"

"And the rabbits, too?"

"Well, of course!"

"I reckon *they* don't know it, sir," Smiley-face muttered, still grinning broadly.

"Don't be an idiot," said Jim.

The poacher held up his forefinger as though in reproach. "I'm a poor man, me lord," he murmured.

"You're a thief."

"Oh, no," replied Smiley-face with assurance. "Poachers isn't thieves, your highness."

"Well they're *my* rabbits."

"But I'm a poor man," the other repeated.

"So you said," Jim answered. "That's no excuse."

Smiley-face shook his head. "You wouldn't be like to understand a poor man—not with a big 'ouse, and 'undreds o' rabbits, you wouldn't."

"Oh, wouldn't I!" said Jim. "I've been poor myself. I've known what it is not to have a cent in the world. I've slept in hedges; I've tramped the roads. . . ."

"*You 'ave?*" The poacher was incredulous, and thrust his head forward, staring at his captor with cunning little eyes.

"Yes, I have," Jim declared.

"*Lordee!*" exclaimed Smiley-face. "Then you know . . ."

"Know what?" asked Jim.

The man made a non-committal gesture. "It's not for me to say what you know, your worship. But you *do* know."

Jim made an impatient movement. "Look here now, if I let you go this time will you promise not to do it again?"

Smiley-face shook his head, and again touched his forelock. "Oh, I couldn't do that, sir. It's tre-menjus sport; and old Jenny she do cook rabbit fine, sir; *and* eat un, too. Don't be angry, your highness," he added quickly, as Jim turned threateningly upon him.

"Don't keep calling me 'your highness' and 'my lord.' I'm a plain man, the same as you."

"So you be, sir," the other smiled. "You've walked the roads; you've lain out o' nights. You

know. And now you're a-askin' o' I not to poach! Oh, you can't do that, sir. . . ."

"Well, supposing I give you permission to poach every now and then?" Jim suggested.

"What?—and tell Mr. Pegett not to shoot I dead? Oh, no; there wouldn't be no sport in that."

Jim held out his hand. "Look here, Smiley-face," he said. "You seem to be pulling my leg, but I rather like you. Let's be friends."

The man drew back. "Well, I don't 'xactly 'old with friends, sir. Friends laughs at friends."

Nevertheless, he grasped the proffered hand.

"Nonsense," Jim replied. "Friends are people who stand by one another through thick and thin. Friends are people who have something in common which they both defend. You and I have something in common, Smiley-face."

"And what be that?" the man asked.

"Why," laughed Jim, "we're both up against it. We're both failures in life, tramps by nature. As you say, we both *know*."

Smiley-face stared at him, not altogether understanding his words.

"You'd better come across the garden with me now," said Jim.

The poacher shook his head. "No, sir, I reckon I'll bide 'ere, and go back through the woods."

"But Pegett's there with his gun."

Smiley-face grinned. "'E'll not get I, never you fear!"

Jim turned and walked towards the gate; and presently his friend the poacher moved stealthily away into the gathering dusk, and soon was lost amongst the trees.

Chapter X: THE END OF THE TETHER

IT must be my laziness," Jim muttered to himself, as he came meandering down the lane after a long rambling walk around Ot Moor, and through the woods on the far side. It was spring once more, and the third anniversary of his marriage had gone by.

His remark was made in answer to his reiterated question as to why he had not sooner broken away. He heartily disliked any kind of "scene," and, being a fatalist, he had preferred to "let things rip," as he termed it, than to make a bid for that freedom which he had so recklessly abandoned. It was true that he had gone up to London more frequently of late; but any longer absences from home had caused such an intolerable display either of temper or of feminine jobbery on Dolly's part that Jim had found the game hardly worth the candle.

She had no great reason to be jealous of her husband, for he was not a man who gave much thought to women. But she was violently jealous of her position as his wife; and anything which suggested that Jim was not dependent on her for companionship, or had any sort of existence in which she played no part, aroused her pique and led her to assert herself with a horrible sort of assurance. Men and women are capable of many inelegances; but there is nothing within the masculine range so gross as a silly woman's view of wedlock.

Jim, as he trudged home between the budding hedges of the lane, and heard the call of the spring reverberating through his deadened heart, wished fervently that he had never inherited his uncle's estate. The afternoon was warm, and the power of the sun, considering the time of the year, was remarkable. It beat into his eyes, and its brilliance seemed to penetrate into his brain, compelling him to rouse himself from his shadowed inaction, and to look about him.

He had been a total failure as a married man, and as a Squire his success had been negligible. His only real friend was Smiley-face, and, though they had little to say to one another, there was always an unspoken understanding between them. Real friendship is occasioned by a mutual sympathy which penetrates through that external skin whereon the artificialities of civilization are stamped, and reaches the heart within, where dwell the reason behind reason, the intelligence beyond intellect, and the clear "Yes" which masters the brain's insistent "No." Jim and the poacher understood one another; and on the part of the latter this understanding was supplemented by gratitude, for it chanced that Jim had saved him on one occasion from arrest and imprisonment. The circumstances need not here be related, and indeed they would not be pleasant to recall; for Smiley-face had thieved, and Jim had lied to save him, and the whole affair was highly prejudicial to law and public safety.

Often, when he was bored, he would go down into the woods and utter a low whistle, like the hoot of an owl, which had become his recognized signal

for calling Smiley-face; and together they would prowl about, sometimes even poaching on other property beyond the lane which curved around the manor estate. This whistle had been heard more than once by villagers walking in the lane, and the story had gone about that the place was haunted, a rumour which Jim encouraged, since it deterred the ever-nervous Dolly from following him into its shadowed depths.

Besides this disreputable friendship, there was little comradeship for him in Eversfield. A few of the villagers liked him he believed, especially the children; but the majority of the inhabitants misunderstood him, and there were those who regarded him with marked hostility. The gipsies who camped on Ot Moor, however, found in him a valuable friend; and the tramps and wandering beggars who visited these parts never went empty from his door.

Presently, as he rounded a corner, he encountered one of those who disliked him in the person of Mrs. Spooner, the doctor's wife, who was riding towards him on her bicycle. Dazzled by the sun in his eyes, he stepped to one side—the wrong side, to give her room, but unfortunately she turned in the same direction and only avoided a collision by applying her brakes with vigour and alighting awkwardly in the rough grass at the roadside.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jim, raising his hat.

She was a fiery, sandy-haired little woman, who always reminded him of an Irish terrier; and her weather-beaten face was wrinkled with anger as she answered him. "*I was on my proper side,*" she barked; "but I don't suppose it has ever occurred to

you that there is such a thing as the Rule of the Road."

Jim was taken aback. "I'm awfully sorry," he repeated. "I'm afraid I've made you angry."

"Angry!" she snapped. "It's no good being angry with you; it makes no impression. And, besides, a doctor's wife has to learn to keep her temper. And then, again, you're my landlord, and one mustn't quarrel with one's landlord."

"Am I a bad landlord?" he asked.

"Well, you're not exactly attentive," she snarled, showing her teeth. "But then you don't seem to understand English ways. You haven't much idea of obligation, have you? When those little girls of yours were ill you ignored my husband and sent for an Oxford doctor. That was hardly polite, was it?"

"Oh, *that's* the trouble, is it?" said Jim. "I say, I'm awfully sorry . . ."

She interrupted him with a gesture. "No, that's only an example of the sort of thing you do. It's your behavior in general we all object to. You haven't got a friend in the place, except the village idiot."

"You mean Smiley-face?" he queried.

"Yes," she replied, still allowing her anger to give rein to her tongue. "Smiley-face, the thief and poacher. *He* loves you dearly: he nearly knifed Ted Barnes the other day for saying what he thought of you. I congratulate you on your champion!"

"Now, what have I done to Ted Barnes?" Jim asked. Ted was the postman.

"That wretched little Dachs of yours bit him," she replied, "and you didn't so much as inquire."

"It's the first I've heard of it," said Jim. "And, anyway, it's my wife's dog, not mine."

"Oh, blame it on to your wife," she sniffed. "It seems to me that the poor dear soul has to take the blame for everything. It's very unfair on her."

This was staggering, and Jim stared at her with mingled anger and astonishment in his dark eyes. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, we can all guess what she suffers," she said. "Only last week she nearly cried in my house. . . . Oh, you needn't think she gave away any secrets, the poor little angel. She said herself 'a wife must make no complaints.' She's the soul of loyalty. But we're not blind, Mr. West."

Jim scratched his head. "And all this because I nearly collided with your bicycle!" he mused.

Mrs. Spooner pulled herself together. "It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back," she growled. "But I suppose I'm putting my foot into it as usual. I'll say no more." And therewith she mounted her bicycle and rode off with her nose in the air. Had she possessed a tail it would have appeared as an excited stump, sticking out from behind the saddle, and vibrating with the thrill of battle.

Jim walked homewards feeling as though he had been bitten in several places. "What is wrong with me?" he muttered aloud. He was, of course, aware that he had not been sociable; for the rank and fashion of Eversfield and its neighbourhood combined the dreary conservatism of English country life with the intellectual affectations of Oxford; and

Oxford, as the Master of Balliol once said, represented "the despotism of the superannuated, tempered by the epigrams of the very young." But he had always thought that he had something in common with Ted Barnes and his friends; for he had overlooked the fact that village opinion is still dictated in England by the "gentry."

The realization was presently borne in on him that Dolly, failing to play with any success the part of the indispensable wife and helpmate, had assumed the rôle of martyr, and had confided her fictitious sorrows to her neighbours. It was a bitter thought; and he slashed at the hedges with his stick as it took hold of his mind.

He determined to tax her with this new delinquency at once; but when he reached the manor he found her sitting in the drawing-room with Mr. Merrivall, the tenant of Rose Cottage, who was lying back in an armchair, smoking a fat cigar which Dolly had evidently fetched for him from the cabinet in the study.

George Merrivall was a mysterious bachelor of middle age, whom Jim could not fathom. He had a heavy, grey face; a weak mouth; round, fish-like eyes, which looked anywhere but at the person before him; and thin brown hair, smoothed carefully across a central area of baldness. He had lived at Rose Cottage for the last ten years or more, and was in receipt of a monthly cheque, which might be interpreted as coming from some person or persons who desired his continued rustication.

There was nothing against him, however, save that after the receipt of each of the cheques he was

said to shut himself up in his cottage for a few days, and the belief was general that at such times he was dead drunk. This, however, might be merely gossip; and his housekeeper, Jane Potts, was a woman of such extremely secretive habits that the truth was not likely to be known. Some people thought that she was, or had been, his mistress; but if this were true this secret, likewise, was well kept. He appeared to be a man of studious habits, a judge of pictures, a collector of rare books, and a regular church-goer.

Dolly had made his acquaintance before she had met Jim, and, since their marriage, he had been one of the few frequent visitors at the manor. Jim, however, did not like him or trust him, thinking him, indeed, somewhat uncanny; and he now greeted him with no enthusiasm.

"Hullo, Squire," drawled the visitor, without rising from his chair. "Been out tramping as usual? You look as though you'd been sleeping under a hedge!"

"James, dear," said Dolly, "you really do look very untidy. And you're all covered over with bits of twigs and things."

"Yes," said Jim, wishing to shock. "I've been having a roll in the grass."

Merrivall laughed. "Who with, you young rascal?" he said, pointing at him with the wet, chewed end of his cigar.

Dolly drew in her breath quickly, and stared with round eyes at her friend, and then with a suspicious frown at her husband. "Where have you been?" she asked deliberately.

"Oh, nowhere in particular," he answered. "Have a drink, Merrivall?"

"Thanks," the other replied. "Whisky and water for me."

Jim rang the bell; and presently, excusing himself by saying that he must change his clothes, left the room.

Now, anyone who had seen him, five minutes later, as he walked across the garden, would have thought him entirely mad; for he was carrying his guitar across his shoulder, drum uppermost, and his stealthy step might have suggested that he was about to use it as a weapon with which to bash in the head of some lurking enemy.

Actually, however, he was in the habit of strumming upon this instrument when his nerves were on edge; and, indeed, there was a melancholy charm in his playing, and a still greater in his singing. But to-day his desire thus to relieve his feelings was accompanied by an anxiety not to be overheard by his wife or Merrivall. Moreover, the twilight outside was as warm and mellow as a summer evening, whereas the interior of the manor was grey and dismal. He had therefore indulged an impulse, and was now slinking off, like a sick dog, to his beloved woods to bay to the rising moon.

Passing through the gates at the end of the lower garden, where the hedges of gorse in full flower formed a golden mass, he entered the silent shadow of the trees; and for some distance he pushed forward between the close-growing trunks until he had reached a favourite resort of his, where there was a fallen oak spanning a little stream. Here, through

a cleft in the trees, he could see the moon, nearly at its full, rising out of the violet haze of the evening; and as he sat down, with his legs dangling above the murmuring water, he listened in silence to the last notes of a thrush's nesting-song that presently died away into the hush of contented rest.

Around him the silent oaks were arrayed, their boughs extending outwards and upwards from the gnarled trunks in fantastic shapes, like huge claws and fingers and probosces, feeling for the departed sunlight. Little leaves were just beginning to appear upon the branches, and here and there beneath them, where the ground was free of undergrowth, bluebells and violets appeared amongst the dead bracken and foliage of last year, and the small white wood-anemones like stars were scattered in profusion. The primroses were nearly over, but bracken shoots, curled like young ferns, were pushing up through the brown remnants of a former generation; low-growing creepers and brambles were sprouting into greenness; and the moss and grasses were tender with new life.

Jim's mood was melancholy, but not sorrowful. It seemed to him that his heart was dead, crushed flat by the flabby hand of that leering figure which personified domestic life, and responded not to the spring. He was so appallingly lonely that if there had been tears within him they now would have overflowed; but there were not. He had no self-pity, no desire to confide his misery to another, no power, it seemed, either to laugh at himself or to weep.

For three long years he had carried his distress

about with him all day long, had gone for lonely walks with it, had sat at home with it, had slept with it, had wakened with it. At first he had obtained relief from within: he had fallen back on his own mind's great reserves of inward entertainment. But now he was no longer self-sufficient, self-supporting. He was utterly barren: without emotion, without love, without the power to write his beloved verses, without a heart, without even despair. He had always been capable of feeling sorrow for, and sympathy with, the griefs of others: he wished now to God that he could lament over his own; but even lamentation was denied him.

Presently, taking up his guitar, he began to sing the first song that came to his head. It was an old Italian refrain to which he had set his own words; and so softly did the strings vibrate under his practised fingers, so sorrowful was his rich voice, that a listener might have imagined him to be a love-lorn minstrel of Florence in the forests of Fiesole. Yet there was no love in his heart.

He sang next a melancholy negro dirge, and, after a long silence, followed on with his own setting of those lines from Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, which tell of one who, looking down into the blue waters of the bay of Baiæ, saw

. . . Old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them.

As he sang there rose before his inward eye a vision of the sun-bathed lands through which he had wandered so happily in the past. He saw again

the white houses reflected in the still waters of the Mediterranean, the olive-groves passing up the hill-sides, the hot roads leading through the red-roofed villages, and the dark-skinned peasants driving their goats along the mountain tracks. He saw the lights of the city of Alexandria twinkling across the bay, and heard the surge of the breakers beating on the rocks. And then, quietly and vaguely, out of the picture there came the serene, mysterious face of a woman, a face he had thought forgotten. Her black hair drifted back into his recollection, her grey eyes seemed to gaze into his, and in his inward ear the one word "Monimé" reverberated like an echo of a dream. And suddenly a door seemed to open within him, and with an overwhelming onset, his captive emotions, his feelings, his long-forgotten joys and sorrows, broke out from their prison and surged through him.

He laid his guitar aside, and for a while sat wrapt in a kind of ecstasy. It was as though he had risen from the grave: it was as though his heart had come back to life within him.

He scrambled to his feet and stood for a moment, staring up at the moon, his fists clenched and drumming upon his breast. Then, to his amazement, he felt his eyes filled with tears—tears which he had not shed since he was a small boy. He uttered a laugh of embarrassment, but it broke in his throat, and all the cynic in him collapsed.

Throwing himself upon the ground, he spread his arms out before him and buried his face in the young violets. He did not care now how foolish nor how unmanly his emotion might seem to be.

Here, in the woods, he was alone, and only the understanding earth should receive his tears.

For some time he lay thus upon his face; but at length the paroxysms passed. He raised his head, and as he did so he became aware, intuitively, that he was being watched.

"Who's there?" he exclaimed, staring into the surrounding undergrowth.

There was a crackling of twigs, and a moment later Smiley-face emerged into the moonlight, and stood before him, touching his forelock.

Jim clambered to his feet. "What the hell are you doing here?" he asked, angrily. He was ashamed that he had been observed, and the colour mounted threateningly into his face.

The poacher grinned. "Beg pardon, sir," he said. "I heerd you singin', and I came to listen. And then I saw you was in trouble, and . . ." He took a crouched step forward, his face puckered up, and his hands twitching. "Oh, sir, my dear, what be the matter? Tell I, sir, tell I!" His voice was passionately insistent. "Tell I! Don't keep it from your friend. Friends stick to one another through thick and thin—you said it yourself, sir: them's your werry words, what you said when we shook 'ands. I'd do anything in the world for you, sir, I would, so 'elp me God! I'm a poacher, and maybe I'm a thief, too, like you said; but s'elp me, I can't see you a'weeping there with your face in the ground—I can't see that, and not say nothin'. Tell I, my dear!—tell your friend. If it's that you've lost all your money, I'll work for you, sir. I don't want no wages. If it's your enemies, say the word and I'll

kill 'em, I will. I'd swing for you, and gladly, too."

Jim stared at him in amazement. The words poured from the man's lips in such a torrent that there could be no question of their boiling sincerity. "Why, Smiley-face," he said at length, "what makes you feel like that about me? I don't deserve it."

Smiley-face laughed aloud. "When I makes a friend," he replied, "I makes a friend. You done things for I what I can't tell you of. You're the first man as ever treated I fair; and now you're breaking your 'eart, and you're letting it break and not tellin' nobody. Tell I, sir, tell I, my dear, I'm askin' you, please."

"There's nothing to tell," smiled Jim, putting his hand on his friend's tattered shoulder. "It's only that people like you and me are failures in life. We don't seem to fit in with English ways. I suppose I got thinking too much about other lands, about the old roads, and the sea, and the desert, and all that sort of thing. But you wouldn't understand: you've never been far away from Eversfield, have you?"

He sat down and motioned Smiley-face to do likewise.

"Tell I about them places, sir," said the poacher, "like what you sings about." Instinctively, and without reasoning, he knew that a long talk was the best remedy for his friend; and gradually, by careful questioning, he launched him forth upon distant seas, and led him to speak of countries far away from the catalepsy of his present existence.

Jim spoke of the winding roads which lead up to the hills of Ceylon, where the ground is covered with

little crimson blossoms of the Laritana, and where the peacocks, sitting in rows by the wayside, utter their wild cries as the bullock-bandies go lurching by, and the monkeys swing from tree to tree, chattering at the travellers. He spoke of the Aroe Islands, where, once a year, the pearl merchants are gathered; and he pictured in words the scene at night on the still waters when every kind of craft is afloat, and every kind of lantern sways under the stars in the warm breath of the wind.

Thence his memory leapt over the seas to the southern coasts of Italy, where, upon a hot summer's night, the little harbour of Brindisi was gay with lanterns in like manner, and the sound of mandolins floated across the water; while the narrow streets were thronged with townspeople taking the air after the heat of the day. Later, he wandered to the slopes of Lebanon, where clear rivulets rush down from the hills, through thickets of oleander, and tumble at last into the blue Mediterranean. He spoke of mulberry orchards, and open tracts covered with a bewildering maze of flowers and flowering bushes: poppies, broom, speedwell, lupin, and many another, so that the hillsides, overhanging the sea, are dazzling to the eyes.

And so he came to Egypt and the desert, and told of the jackal-tracks which lead back from the Nile into the barren, mysterious hills, where a man may lose himself and die of thirst within a mile or two of hidden wells; where the mirage rises like a lake from the parched sand, and lures the thirsty traveller to his doom; and where the vultures circle

in the blue heavens, waiting for the men and the camels who fall and lie still.

For a long time he sat talking thus, while the moon rose above the trees; but at length the chill of the air reminded him that he ought to be returning to the manor, and, picking up his guitar, he rose to his feet. Smiley-face, however, did not move. He was staring in front of him, his two hands thrust into the grass.

"Come along," said Jim. "I must go back to the house now."

The poacher looked up at him with a curious expression upon his face. "Reckon you baint agoin' to tell I what your trouble is, sir," he smiled.

Jim shook his head. "No," he answered. "I can't talk about it, somehow. But I'll tell you this, Smiley-face: if I ever do talk to anybody about it all it'll be to you."

When he reached the manor, Jim found that he was late for dinner; and at the foot of the stairs he was confronted by Dolly, who was much annoyed at seeing him still in his day clothes.

"Oh, James!" she exclaimed, angrily. "Where *have* you been? Dinner has already been kept back a quarter of an hour for you."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I'm quite impossible. Don't wait for me: I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Don't hurry," she replied, icily. "Mr. Merrivall is going to dine with us. I shan't be lonely."

Chapter XI: THE DEPARTURE

FOR three years, for three interminable years, Jim had borne the stagnation of his married life at Eversfield, the door of his heart shut against the whispering voices which bade him turn his back on his heritage and come out into the free world once more. But now matters had reached a psychological crisis. Something had happened to him; something had opened the door again. And as he sat in his room that night these voices seemed to assail him from all sides, enticing him to leave England, coaxing him, wheedling him, jeering at him for his lack of enterprise, and persuading him with the pictured delights of other lands.

"Give it up!" they murmured. "You were never meant for this sort of thing: you can never find happiness here. Think of the sound of the sea as it slaps the bow of the outbound liner; think of the throb of the screw; think of the noisy boatloads surrounding the ship when the anchor has rattled into the transparent water of a southern harbour; the familiar sound and smells of hot little towns, sheltering under the palms; the soft crunch of camels' pads upon the desert sands; the far-off cry of the jackals. Think of the unshackled life of the happy wanderer; the freedom from the restraint of the Great Sham; the absence of these posings and pretences of so-called respectability. Give it up, you fool; and take

your lazy body over the hills and far away: for your lost content awaits you beyond the horizon, and it will never come back to you in this stagnant valley."

Until late in the night he allowed his thoughts to wander in forbidden places, and when at last he sought comfort in sleep, his dreams were full of far-away things and alluring scenes. In the early morning he lay awake for an hour before it was time to take his bath; and through the open window the sound of the chimes from the distant spires of Oxford floated into the room.

"Confound those blasted bells!" he cried, suddenly springing from his bed. "They have drugged me long enough. To-day I am awake: I shall sleep no more!"

Of a sudden he formed a resolution. He would go away alone for two or three months, in spite of any protest which his wife might make. And not only would he take this single holiday: he would lay his plans so that there should be another scheme of existence to which, in the future, he could retire whenever his home became unbearable. His uncle had led a double life: he, too, would do so; not, however, in the company of any Emily, but in the far more alluring society of that Lady called Liberty. James Tundering-West, Squire of Eversfield, from henceforth should be subject to perennial eclipses, and at such times Jim Easton, vagrant, should be resuscitated.

He would sell out a couple of thousand pounds' worth of stock, and generously place it as a first instalment to the credit of Jim Easton in another

part of the world; and nobody but himself should know about it. For the last three years he had lived mainly on his rent-roll, and this should remain the means of subsistence of his wife, and of himself so long as he was in England. But the bulk of the remainder of his fortune left of late almost untouched, should gradually be transferred, little by little, to the credit of the wanderer.

At breakfast he was so enthralled with his scheme that he paid no attention whatsoever to Dolly's offended silence. He told her that he was going to London for a few days, and that very possibly he would there make arrangements to go abroad for a holiday.

"As you please," she replied, coldly. "I, too, need a change; but I can't play the deserter. I must stay here, and try to do my duty."

Driving into Oxford he turned the matter over in his mind unceasingly, and in the train he thought of little else, nor so much as glanced at the newspapers he had brought. The difficulty was to think out a means whereby he could now place this capital sum to the account of Jim Easton, and later add to it, without using his cheque book or any bank notes which could be traced; for all the salt would be gone out of the proposed enterprise if his recurrent change of personality were open to detection. He wanted to be able to say to Dolly each year: "I am going away, and I shall be back about such-and-such a date, until then I shall not be able to be found, nor troubled in any way by the exigencies of domestic life."

At length, as he reached the hotel where he was

going to stay, the simple solution came to him; and so eager was he to put the plan into execution that he was off upon the business so soon as he had deposited his dressing-case in the bedroom. In South Africa he had become an expert in the valuation of diamonds, and now he proposed to put this knowledge to use. He knew the addresses of two or three dealers who supplied the trade with unset stones; and to these he made his way, with the result that during the afternoon he had selected some twenty small diamonds which were to be held for him until his cheques should be forthcoming.

The business was resumed next day; and by the following evening he had depleted his capital by two thousand pounds, and in its place he held a little boxful of diamonds which, so far as he could tell, were worth considerably more than he had paid for them. These stones he proposed to sell again, practically one by one, in various foreign cities, depositing the proceeds in the name of Jim Easton at some bank, say in Rome; and, as all the jewels were of inconspicuous size and small value, his dealings would not be able to be traced beyond the original purchases in London, even if so far as that.

Before returning to Oxford he decided to pay a call on Mrs. Darling to invite her to go down to stay at Eversfield during his absence. He regarded her as a capable, good-natured, and entirely unprincipled woman; and she had invariably shown him that at any rate she liked him, if she were not always proud of him. As a mother-in-law she had been extraordinarily circumspect, and, in fact, she had effaced herself to a quite unnecessary extent, seldom

coming to stay at the manor, but preferring to pass most of her time at her little flat in London.

She was at home when he called, and greeted him with affection, good-temperedly scolding him for not writing to her more often.

"You might have peaceably passed away, for all I knew," she said.

Jim smiled. "Oh, I think Dolly would have mentioned it, if I had," he replied. He gazed around the room: it was always a source of profound astonishment to him. The walls were silver-papered, the woodwork was scarlet, the furniture was of red lacquer, the carpet was grey, and the chairs and sofa were upholstered in grey silk, ornamented with much silver fringe and many tassels of silver and scarlet. Upon the walls were a dozen Bakst-like paintings of women displaying bits of their remarkable anatomy through unnecessary apertures in their tawdry garments; and as Jim stared at them he was devoutly thankful that Mrs. Darling had not robed herself in like manner.

She followed the direction of his gaze. "Hideous, aren't they?" she said.

"They are, rather," he replied. "Why do you have them?"

"Well, you see," she answered, "so many milliners and dressmakers come to see me in connection with my monthly fashion articles; and they would of course think nothing of my taste if I had any really nice pictures on my walls."

She dived behind the sofa and rose again with her hands full of a medley of startling nightgowns.

"Look at these!" she laughed. "They were left

here for me to criticise by a shop which calls itself 'Frocks, Follies, and Fragrance.' Horrible, aren't they? The only nice thing about them is their exquisite material. I always say to all young married women: 'Flannel nightgowns may keep *you* warm, but *crêpe-de-Chine* will keep your husband.'

Jim stared at the wildly coloured garments long and thoughtfully. "I sometimes think," he said at length, "that women have no sense of humour."

"No more has Nature," she replied. "Look at the camel." She changed the conversation. "Tell me," she said, "how is Dolly?"

"Top hole, thanks," he replied.

"I notice," Mrs. Darling remarked, as they sat down together on the big sofa, "that you don't bring her to Town with you nowadays. I hope you're not leading a double life?"

"No," he answered.

"That's right," she said. "That's a good boy! Have you taken to drink yet?"

Jim laughed. "No, why should I?"

"Most married men do," she told him. "My own husband did. He never really showed it; but I've seen him get up the morning after, turn on a cold bath, drink it, and go to bed again."

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Jim, "I *am* thinking of breaking loose for a bit. That's really what I've come to see you about. I want your advice."

"Advice! Advice from *me*?" she exclaimed. "Why, my dear boy, my advice on domestic affairs would be worth about as much as the figure 0 without its circumference-line."

"Well, not your advice exactly, but your help. The fact is, I want to get away. I've grown flat and stale down at Eversfield, and I think Dolly finds me rather a bore sometimes. I have an idea that it would do us both a lot of good if I were to go off for a bit by myself."

Mrs. Darling looked anxiously at him, and her jesting manner left her for a moment. "I hope nothing has gone wrong between you?" she said earnestly.

Jim hastened to assure her. "Oh, no, everything is quite all right."

"I'm sure I hope so," she replied. "But I know Dolly is rather exacting."

"It's my own fault," he remarked, quickly. "I must be quite impossible as a husband."

Mrs. Darling uttered an exclamation of distress. "Oh, then there *is* something wrong?" she said. "I thought so, from the tone of her letters."

Jim was embarrassed. "No, I only want to get away because I'm not very well, and also because I want to polish up some old verses of mine."

She looked at him earnestly. "My dear boy," she said, "if you've lost your trousers, it's no good putting on two coats. If you're unhappy at home, it's no good kidding yourself with other reasons for getting away."

"I assure you . . ." Jim began.

She interrupted him. "Come on, now—what d'you want me to do? D'you want me to persuade Dolly to let you go?"

He shook his head. "No," he answered. "I am going anyhow. What I want you to do is to keep

an eye on her while I'm gone. Take her away for a holiday, if you like: I'll gladly pay all expenses. Keep her amused."

"How long to you intend to be away?" she asked.

"Oh, a couple of months or so," he replied. "I don't exactly know . . ."

She turned to him, searchingly. "Is it another woman?"

"No, no," he laughed. "I dislike women intensely."

"Thank you!" she smiled. "On behalf of my daughter and myself, thank you!" She was silent for a while. "I wonder why you ever married?" she said, at length.

"We all have our romances," he answered.

"Romances!" She uttered the word with bitterness. "What is romance? Just Nature's fig-leaf. It is something that Youth employs to disguise something else. Youth is a calamity. I really sometimes thank Heaven for middle age and old age: they bring one at any rate the blessing of indifference. I'm thankful that I'm an old woman."

"You're not old," Jim replied. "You don't look forty. And you're in the pink of health."

"Yes, my dear," she said. "I've nothing much to complain of in that respect. All I want is a new pair of legs and a clean heart . . ."

"Oh, your heart's all right," he told her, putting his hand on hers.

"No," she answered. "I'm a bad old woman. I earn a living by writing indecently about women's clothes, and how to wear them so as to destroy men's

virtue. I sit about in night-clubs; I play cards on Sundays; I'll dine with anybody on earth who'll give me a good dinner and a bottle of wine; and I never go to church. What d'you think Eversfield would say to that?"

"Oh, Eversfield be hanged," he replied, with feeling. "You're a good sort, and you're kind. That's better than all the rotten respectability of Eversfield."

"I'm not so sure," she said. "Respectability has its merits. You go and spend a few weeks with the sort of people I mix with, and you'll find Miss Proudfoote of the Grange like a breath of fresh air."

"I'm sure I shouldn't," Jim answered with conviction.

She shrugged her shoulders, and presently their conversation turned in other directions.

When at length he rose to go, he startled her by remarking that he would not see her again until his return from his travels; and to her surprised question he replied that he was going down to Oxford next morning, and that on the following day he would set out on his wanderings.

She looked anxiously at him once more. "There isn't any real quarrel between you and Dolly, is there?" she asked again.

He reassured her. "No, none at all. It's only that I have a craving for Italy . . ."

"Well," she said, "if you live in a thatched house, don't start letting off Roman candles."

"What d'you mean?" he laughed.

"I mean," she replied. ". . . Oh, never mind

what I mean. Don't go the pace, and don't stay away too long; or there'll be trouble. Don't forget that you've got a tradition to keep going. Don't forget your uncle's tombstone. What does it say? —'A man who nobly upheld the traditions of his race. . . .'

"Yes, isn't it rot?" he answered. "Do you know I came across some of his letters, and I can tell you his respectability was only skin-deep. All his life he lived a lie, and now he lies in his grave, and his epitaph lies above him."

She took his proffered hand in hers and held it for a moment. "Jim, my boy," she said, "I'm only a wicked old woman; but I've got a great respect for virtue, even when it's only skin-deep. It's the people who don't care what their neighbours say who come to grief."

When Jim returned to Oxford and broke the news of his immediate departure to Dolly, she received it with a calmness which he had not expected. He had anticipated a painful scene, and he was even a little disappointed that she fell in so readily with his plans.

"Yes," she said. "If you've made up your mind to go, it's no good hanging about here. You've been finding rather a lot of fault with me lately. Perhaps when you are alone you will appreciate all I've done for you."

"Of course I shall, dear," he replied.

Quietly, and in a very business-like manner, she asked him what arrangements he had made about the money she was to draw; and this being settled

to her satisfaction she approached, with apparent diffidence, a more important subject.

"I do hope you aren't going to any dangerous places," she said. "You mustn't take any risks."

He assured her that he had no intention of doing so.

"But supposing anything happened to you," she went on, "what would become of me?"

"I'll make my will, if you like," he laughed.

She uttered a gasp of horror. "What a dreadful thought!" she murmured. She was silent for a few moments, her eyes gazing out of the window, her mouth a little open. Then, without looking at him, she said: "I suppose just a line on a sheet of paper will do? You only have to say that you leave everything to me . . . at least I take it that there's nobody else to leave it to?" She turned to him with an innocent smile.

"Oh, no, it's all yours if I die," he replied.

"Well, you'd better do it now before you forget," she said, smiling at him and patting his hand. She pointed to the writing-bureau in the corner of the room. "You just scribble it on a half-sheet, and seal it up, and write on the envelope 'to be opened in the event of my death,' and post it to your solicitors. That's all."

"You seem to have thought it all out," he laughed, going to the bureau.

"Oh, James!" she exclaimed, reproachfully. "What dreadful things you do say!"

His departure on the following morning was unceremonious. In spite of Dolly's anxieties in regard to his safety, the fact remained that he was only

going away for a couple of months or thereabouts. He was to take but a single portmanteau with him; his precious diamonds were to be carried in a knotted handkerchief in his pocket; and in his hand he would hold only a stout walking-stick. The only persons who appeared to be concerned at his going were the two little girls; and even they—as is the habit of children—returned to their play before the carriage had left the door.

Dolly had said she would drive with him into Oxford to see him off in the train; but, as he was to depart at an early hour, she was not dressed in time, and was therefore obliged to bid him “good-bye” at the foot of the stairs. She looked a pretty little creature, standing there in a pink dressing-gown, with the morning sunlight striking upon her fair hair, which fell around her shoulders, as though she had been disturbed in the act of combing it, and with a background of the dark portraits of previous owners of the manor. In her hand she was carrying a large bunch of apple-blossom, which she accounted for by saying that she had just been picking it from outside her bedroom window at the moment when he called out to her. Knowing her habit of studying effects, Jim felt sure that she had thought out this charming picture, and had never had any intention of accompanying him to the station; nor had he the heart to ask her why, if she had but now plucked the blossom from the tree, the stems should be dripping with water as though just lifted from a vase.

“Every picture tells a story,” he muttered to himself as he drove away, “and some tell downright lies.”

Chapter XII: THE ESCAPE

ON his arrival in Paris, his sensations were not far removed from bliss; but soon he was obliged to set about the tedious business of selling his diamonds, one by one, in a manner so unobtrusive and anonymous that no particular notice should be paid to the deals. He was somewhat disappointed to find that, in spite of his expert knowledge both of the stones and of the channels for their disposal, he failed to avoid a slight loss on the various transactions; but he was in no mood to bargain, and he was well content, at the end of the second day, to be rid of a quarter of his collection, and to feel the notes, which were to be the support of his future wanderings, pleasantly bulging out of his pocket-book.

From Paris he proceeded to Lyons, Marseilles, and Monte Carlo, in which places he disposed of the remainder of his collection, this time at a small profit. During these business transactions he felt that he was generally regarded as a thief, and more than once his experiences were unpleasant; but he was so full of the idea of hiding his tracks, and of building up once more the old life of freedom beyond the range of Dolly's prying eyes, that he adopted, without any regard to his natural sensitiveness, all manner of subterfuges and variations of name.

At length, with quite an unwieldy packet of small

notes, he made his way along the coast, crossed the frontier, being still under his real name, and stopped at Savona, Genoa, and Spezia, where he laboriously changed the money, little by little, into Italian currency. He then proceeded by way of Pisa to Rome, where, with a sense of almost schoolboyish exultation, he deposited his vagrant's fortune at a well-known bank, and opened an account in the name of "James Easton." This accomplished, he felt that he had taken the first firm step in his emancipation; for in future, whenever Eversfield became unbearable, he could speed over to Rome, even for but a month at a time, and, moving eastwards or southwards from this base, under the name by which he had formerly been known, he would always find money at his disposal, and complete freedom from domestic obligations.

He had now been gone from England some fourteen days, but Rome was the first place at which he had assumed this other name, for he intended Italy to be the western frontier of the vagrant's life. The change of name meant far more to him than can easily be realized: it had a psychological effect upon his mind, such as, in a lesser degree, can sometimes be produced by a complete change of clothes. He almost hoped that he would be recognized and hailed by some acquaintance from England in order that he might look him deliberately in the face and say: "I am afraid you have made a mistake. My name is Easton: I come from Egypt."

Having assumed this alias his first object was to recapture the old beloved sense of liberty by resuming his wandering existence, and by turning his

back upon the elegances of life. Under the name of Easton, therefore, he at once selected a small inn in the democratic Trastevere quarter, near the Ponte Sisto, which had been recommended to him as the resort of commercial travellers and the like who desired a little cleanliness in conjunction with moderate honesty and extreme low prices; and having here deposited his portmanteau and engaged a room for a fortnight hence, he went at once to the railway station with nothing but a knapsack and a walking-stick in his hand and took the long journey back to Pisa, his intention being to wander southwards from that point along the beautiful coast, where the pine-woods came down to the seashore.

During the years at Eversfield his emotions had dried up, and he had become barren of all exalted thoughts. He was, as he expressed it to himself, continuously "off the boil." But now once more his brain was galvanized, and all his actions were intensified, speeded up, and ebullient. His power of enjoyment, lost so long, had come back to him, and now not infrequently he was blessed with that fine frenzy which had left his mind unvisited these many weary months. He was a different man to-day: again hot-blooded, again eager to listen to the lure of the unattained, again capable of soaring, as it were, to the sun and the stars.

Two days later there befell him an adventure which changed the whole course of his life.

He had been walking all day through the pines and along the beach, and in the late afternoon he inquired of a passer-by whether there were any village in the neighbourhood where he might spend the

night. The man replied that the path by which Jim was going led to a small fishermen's inn, where a room and a meal were generally to be obtained, but that if he desired to reach the next little town he would have to retrace his steps and make a considerable detour, for, although it stood upon the seashore only three kilometres further along, it could not be approached by the beach, owing to the presence of a wide estuary. The day having been extremely hot, Jim was tired, and he therefore decided to try his luck at this house, which, the man said, was distant but ten minutes' walk.

He found it to be a high, square, drab-washed building, which like so many poorer houses in Italy, gave the melancholy suggestion that it had seen better days. The red-tiled roof was in need of repair, the green shutters were falling to pieces, and there were innumerable cracks and small dilapidations upon its extensive areas of blank wall. The only indications that it was an inn were a long table and a bench upon one side of the narrow doorway, and a number of crude drawings in charcoal upon the lower part of the front wall.

The house stood upon a mound facing the beach, and backed by the dark pines; and at one side there was a patch of cultivated ground in which a few vegetables were growing. A small rowing-boat, moored by a rope, floated upon the smooth surface of the sea, and upon a group of rocks near by two dark-skinned fishermen sat smoking cigarettes. One of these, upon seeing Jim, put his hand to his mouth and called out to the innkeeper, who replied from some empty-sounding part of the ground-floor, and

presently came with clamorous footsteps along the stone-flagged passage to the door.

He was a tall, stout man, with a two-days' growth of grey stubble covering the lower part of his tanned face, and an untidy mat of white hair upon his head. His forehead was deeply wrinkled, and his eyes were screwed up as though the light hurt him. Had he changed his loose corduroy trousers and his collarless striped shirt for the garb of his ancestors, one would have said that the marble Sulla of the Vatican Museum had come to life.

Jim was in two minds as to whether to spend the night in this somewhat forbidding house, or to proceed upon his way; and he therefore asked only for a bottle of wine, at the same time inviting his host to drink a glass with him. The man accepted the invitation with alacrity, and, disappearing into the echoing house, soon returned with the bottle. He hesitated, however, before drawing the cork, and diffidently mentioned the price, whereupon Jim put his hand in his pocket and drew forth his loose change. The wrinkles deepened on the man's forehead as he gazed at the money, and an expression of disappointment passed over his face; for the coins did not amount to the sum named. Jim, however, smilingly reassured him, and produced his roll of notes, from which he selected one, asking whether his host could change it. At this the man's face showed his satisfaction, and he hastened to uncork the bottle, thereafter fetching the change and sitting down to enjoy the wine with every token of brotherly love.

For some time they talked, and it was very soon

apparent that the innkeeper was of the braggart type. He had once been in the army, and he described with great gusto his gallant exploits and feats of arms, relating also his affairs of the heart, and telling how once he fought a duel and killed his man for the sake of a girl who was in no wise worthy of him. Jim listened with amusement, and presently, in answer to his host's questions, he explained that he himself was merely a mild Englishman, and that he was walking from village to village along the coast by way of a holiday. This statement was received with frank astonishment, and led to a further series of inquiries, to which Jim replied with amused volubility, pointing out the delights of a wandering life, and speaking of the pleasures of a state of incognito, when hearth and home are temporarily abandoned, and nobody knows whither one has disappeared. The innkeeper listened with evident interest, looking at him searchingly from time to time as he talked, and forgetting to boast or even drink his wine, as he sat with folded arms and wrinkled brow, staring out to sea.

The sun was setting when at length Jim rose to his feet to consider whether he should proceed or should stay the night where he was. His legs felt weary, however; and when his host presently made the suggestion that he should inspect the guest-chamber upstairs, Jim was quickly persuaded to do so, and, finding it quite habitable, at once decided to remain until morning.

The innkeeper thereupon retired into the back premises to prepare a meal, and Jim sauntered down to the beach to enjoy the cool of the dusk. Climb-

ing over the promontory of smooth, rounded rocks, to one of which the rowing-boat was moored, he pulled the little craft towards him by its rope, and, scrambling into it, sat for some time handling the oars and gazing down into the water. It was very pleasant to ride here upon the gently moving swell, listening to the quiet surge of the waves upon the shore, and watching the fading colours of the sky; and when, in the dim light, he saw his host appear at the doorway of the house, looking about him for his guest, he stepped back on to the rocks with lazy reluctance.

The fare presently provided in the front room was rough but appetizing, and when the meal was finished he returned once more to the table outside, where he found his host seated with three other men, for whom, after a ceremonious introduction, Jim called for another bottle of wine. The appearance of these other guests, however, was not pleasant: they looked, in fact, as disreputable a gang of cut-throats as ever sat round a guttering candle; and once or twice he thought he observed upon the innkeeper's face an expression something like that of apology.

Nevertheless, the party remained talking, and their host continued his bragging, far into the night, for it seemed that all of them were to sleep at the inn; and it was midnight before Jim made his salutations and was lighted up to his room by the owner of the house.

As soon as he was alone he went to the open window, and stared out into the darkness. The sky was brilliant with stars which were reflected in the

sea, whose rhythmic sobbing came to his ears; but he could only dimly discern the rocks and the little rowing-boat, and the line of the beach was lost in the indigo of the night. For some time he stood deep in thought; but at length, of a sudden, a feeling of apprehension entered his mind, and, returning into the candlelight, he remained for a while irresolute in the middle of the room.

The sensation, however, presently passed; but in order to occupy his thoughts he drew from his pocket an unused picture-postcard, which he had purchased on the previous day, and performed the much postponed duty of writing a line to his wife, telling her shortly that he was well. He addressed the card to her and laid it aside, with the intention of posting it at some obscure village whose name upon the postmark would convey nothing to Dolly. Then, seating himself upon the side of the bed, he prepared to undress.

As he stooped to unlace his boots the tremor of apprehension returned to him, and for some moments he sat perfectly still, looking at the candle, and wondering at his unfamiliar nervousness. "I suppose," he thought to himself, "I have been too long in the shelter of Eversfield, and have grown unaccustomed to the ordinary circumstances of the wanderer's life."

Then, like a sudden flash, the recollection came to him that the innkeeper had seen his roll of notes, and that the man knew him to be an unattached wayfarer, and consequently fair game for robbery or even murder. The thought set his heart beating in a manner which shamed him; and, though he

fought against it resolutely, he permitted himself, nevertheless, to creep over to the door and to slide the clumsy bolt into its socket. He then felt in his pocket to assure himself that his matches were at hand; and, having placed the candle by his bedside, he blew out the light and prepared himself for an uncomfortable night.

For some time he lay quietly upon the bed, fully dressed, his eyes turned to the open window, through which the brilliant stars were visible; but at length sleep began to overcome his forebodings, so that he dozed, and at last passed into unconsciousness.

He awoke with an instant conviction that some sound had disturbed him; and for a moment he felt his pulses hammering as he listened intently. The stars had moved across the heavens during his slumbers, and their position now suggested that dawn was not far off, a fact of which he was profoundly glad, for his mind was filled with a very definite kind of dread, and he was eager to be up and away. Something, he was convinced, had been going on while he slept: he could feel it, as it were, in his bones.

He was about to light the candle when, to his extreme horror, he caught sight of a man's head slowly rising above the level of the window-sill and blotting out the stars. Jim lay absolutely still, desperately concentrating his brains to meet the situation; and as he did so the figure outside the window, like a menacing black shadow, stealthily raised itself until the arms and shoulders were visible, and he was able to recognize the large proportions of the innkeeper.

The room was in complete darkness, and, realizing that he himself could not be seen, Jim silently extended his hand until his fingers clasped themselves around the brass candlestick at his side. His agitation gave place to the thrill of battle, and, with a bound like that of a wild animal, he sprang to his feet and dashed at the intruder. At the same moment the man clambered into the room; and, an instant later, the two were in contact.

A frenzied blow with the heavy candlestick struck the innkeeper's uplifted arm, and the knife which he had been carrying fell to the floor. The man darted to recover it, whereat Jim aimed a second blow as he stooped; but, before he could strike, the innkeeper's left hand crashed into his face, so that he staggered back across the room with the blood pouring from his nose. Regaining his balance, he again rushed forward; and before the other could raise his recovered knife the candlestick descended upon his head, with a most satisfactory thud, and, without a sound, the man fell in a heap upon the floor.

For a moment Jim stood over him, his improvised weapon raised to strike again. He felt the blood streaming from his nose, and, pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, he attempted in vain to arrest the flow, at the same time wondering what next he should do. He could just discern the dark outline of the figure at his feet, but there was no sign of movement, and he wondered whether the man were dead. At the moment he certainly hoped so.

Then, sniffing and panting, he felt for his matches

and struck a light. The candle, which had fallen from its socket, lay on the floor before him; and this he now lit, replacing it in the brass holder which had served him so well. Next, he glanced out of the window, and saw, as he had expected, a ladder leaning against the wall; but, though he could now hear voices in the house, there seemed to be no one at the foot of the ladder, so far as the darkness permitted him to discern.

This appeared, therefore, to be the best means of escape, and, snatching up his hat and slinging his knapsack across his shoulder, he hastened towards the window. As he did so the figure upon the floor showed signs of returning life, and Jim hastily stooped and picked up the man's ugly-looking knife, while the blood from his nose steadily dripped upon it, upon the clothes of his unconscious assailant, and upon the bare boards.

He was in the act of climbing over the sill when he heard voices at the bedroom door, and saw the bolt rattle. At this he slid down the ladder at break-neck speed, and raced through the darkness as fast as his legs would carry him towards the beach. For a moment he hesitated upon the soft sand, recollecting that in the one direction—the way he had come yesterday—there was no habitation for many miles, while in the other the estuary, of which he had been told, cut him off from the neighbouring town.

Behind him he heard a considerable commotion in the house, and at the lighted window of his abandoned bedroom he saw a figure appear for a moment. The other men, then, had burst into the

room, and in a few moments they would doubtless be after him.

Suddenly he thought of the rowing-boat, and, with a gasp of relief, he ran out on to the rocks. Here he slipped and fell, thereby losing the innkeeper's knife; but, with hands wet with the blood from his nose, he clutched at the boulders, and clambered forward. A few minutes later he had lifted the boat's mooring-rope from the rock around which it was fastened, and had pushed out to sea.

For some minutes he rowed at his best speed away from the land, but presently he rested on his oars to listen to the cries and curses which came over the water to his ears out of the darkness. His mood was now exultant, for he had observed on the previous evening that there was no other craft of any kind within sight, and a pull of two or three kilometres would bring him to the neighbouring town. He was now enjoying the adventure, for he felt that it marked the breaking of the long monotony of his days at Eversfield and the beginning of a new and more vivid existence, far removed from the petty incidents of English village life. He could not resist the temptation to shout out some bantering remark to the men upon the beach whom he could not see, and soon his voice was sounding across the dark water, bearing impolite messages to the innkeeper and a few choice words for themselves. Their oaths returned to him out of the night, and set him laughing; and presently he resumed his rowing now with a less frenzied stroke, heading towards the three or four solitary lights which marked his destination.

And thus, as the first light of dawn appeared

in the eastern sky, he quietly beached the little boat upon the deserted shore in front of the houses, and stepped out on to the sand. The current had been running strongly against him, and the journey had taken him longer than he had expected; but in the cool night air, under the glorious stars, he had found himself thoroughly happy, and his excitement seemed but to have added zest to his life.

A troublesome question, however, now arose in his mind as to whether he should go at once to the police, or whether it would be wiser to keep silent in regard to his adventure. If he reported the matter and subsequently had to appear in the courts, the pleasant secret of his double identity would have to be revealed. That would be the end of James Easton, for, in the limelight which would be turned upon him, he would be obliged to admit to his real name. On the other hand, he would dearly like to bring the innkeeper and his confederates to justice.

He now, therefore sat down upon the beach in the dim light of daybreak and carefully thought the matter out in all its aspects; the result being that at length he very reluctantly decided to hold his tongue, and, with the first rays of the sun, to proceed upon his way.

Taking off his boots and socks, and rolling up his trousers, he went back to the boat, and, wading into the water, pushed it out to sea with all his strength, thereafter watching it as it slowly floated back towards the estuary, in which direction the current was travelling. He then went over to a cluster of rocks, behind which he would be unobserved, and there he opened his knapsack and made his toilet,

washing the crusted blood from his face and hands and the front of his coat.

When he emerged at length, the sun had risen; and he walked into the little town in an entirely inconspicuous manner. Here he presently ascertained that there was a railway-station, and he observed that a number of people were already making their way thither to catch the early market-train. Nobody took any notice of him as he bought his ticket and entered the compartment, for in appearance he differed little from an ordinary Italian, and he was not called upon to speak at sufficient length to reveal any faults in his accent. This was all to the good, since his sole object now was to leave the neighbourhood of his adventure in order to preserve the secret of his double life. Thus half an hour later he was jogging along back to Pisa, and by mid-morning he was on his way to Florence, none the worse for his adventure, and having suffered no loss with the exception of his walking-stick, his handkerchief, a great deal of blood, and much of his confidence in the Italian peasant.

Arrived at Florence, he engaged a room, in the name of Easton, at a small and quiet hotel, and here he decided to remain for the next few days, and to forget his growing indignation against the murderous innkeeper, since no redress was possible without exposure of his carefully laid plans. His amazement and agitation may thus be imagined when, on the following morning, he read in his newspaper that he was believed to have been murdered.

The account was circumstantial. A police patrol, riding along the beach an hour before dawn, had

come upon two men acting in what was described as a suspicious manner outside the inn. Questions were being put to them when the innkeeper appeared at a window and shouted out, asking whether their victim had been "finished off." This led to a search of the house, and to the examination of the disordered and bloodstained bedroom, and to the discovery of a walking-stick bearing the name "J. Tundering-West" upon the silver band, a blood-soaked handkerchief marked J. T.-W., and a post-card addressed by the victim to Mrs. Tundering-West. Thereupon the dazed innkeeper and his friends were arrested, and it was observed that there were spots of blood upon the clothes of the former. A further search, after the sun had risen, had revealed bloodstains leading down to and upon the rocks, whither the body had evidently been carried; while a bloodstained knife, thrown aside at the edge of the water, and marks of a struggle, indicated that the unfortunate man had here been "finished off" before being dropped into the sea.

The arrested men had confessed to being associated with an attempted act of violence, but swore that the intended victim had escaped in the boat, and that one of their number, who was the only guilty party, had fled. This, however, was a palpable lie, for the boat was later found beached at the mouth of the estuary a short distance away, and if it had been used at all, which was not at all certain, it must have been utilized as a means of escape by that one of their number who had bolted.

Meanwhile, the police had ascertained that Mr. Tundering-West had been staying at Genoa three

days previously; and that an Englishman, whose name did not appear in the hotel register, but was probably identical, had stopped at the little Hotel Giovanni in Pisa on the nights previous to the crime. During the day a police-launch had scoured the sea in the neighbourhood, but the body had not been found.

Jim was dazed as he read the amazing words, and for some time thereafter he sat staring in front of him, lost in a maze of speculation. Two thoughts, however, stood out clearly in the confusion of his mind. In the first place he must not allow the inn-keeper to suffer the extreme penalty for a crime which fortunately had not been committed; and in the second place he would have to notify Dolly that he was safe.

Presently, therefore, he made his way towards a telegraph office, and then, changing his mind, enquired his way to the police-station. He was feverishly anxious to preserve the secret of his identity with Jim Easton, for that name seemed to represent his freedom, and he was filled with disappointment that all his schemes for his periodical liberty should thus fall to pieces; yet he could not devise a means of preserving his secret, and he hovered, irresolute, between the Scylla of the telegram and the Charybdis of this devastating notification to the police.

He was standing at a street corner, near the telegraph office, racking his brains, when a newspaper boy passed him, selling an evening paper; and he bought a copy in order to read the latest news in regard to his own murder. Great developments, he found, had taken place during the day. Acting upon

an anonymous communication, the police had dug up the flagstones of one of the basement rooms of the inn, and there they had found the decomposing body of a certain Italian gentleman who had disappeared some months previously; and, following upon this, the innkeeper had made a dramatic confession. It was true, he declared, that both murders were the work of his hands. In the case of the Italian, the victim had insulted a woman of his acquaintance and a duel had followed; and in the case of the Englishman, the motive had been revenge for an insult to his beloved Italy. He had offered to fight this foreigner like a gentleman, but the stranger had taken a mean advantage of him and had struck him with a candlestick. Thereupon he had stabbed him deeply, as the blood indicated, but not fatally, for there had followed a pretty fight; and at last he had lifted his opponent from the ground and had hurled him straight through the window. Then, contemptuously handing his knife to that one of his friends who had cravenly fled, he had told him to finish the work, and to throw the body to the fishes.

At this Jim's heart leapt within him, and he laughed aloud. It was now totally unnecessary for him to save the braggart's neck by revealing the fact that he was alive and unhurt. Indeed, he smiled, he had not the heart to spoil the man's boastful story. The innkeeper was a proven murderer or manslayer, and there was no need to speak up in his defence. The finding of the first victim's body, and the consequent confession, had completely ended the matter; and now the law could take its course. And upon the heels of this con-

clusion there came rushing forward another thought—a thought which had been lurking in the back of his mind ever since he had read the first news of the crime.

“James Tundering-West is dead,” he muttered; “the Squire of Eversfield is *dead!* But Jim Easton, the vagrant, is alive!”

He struck his breast with his fist, and set off walking aimlessly along the street, away from the telegraph office. Of a sudden, it seemed to him, an incubus had been removed. That fat, leering figure in its tight black coat, which, in his imagination, had come to represent domestic life and village society, had collapsed like a pricked balloon. It had leered at him for the last time, and, with a whistle of escaping air, had shrunk into a little heap, over which he was even now leaping to freedom.

“Jim Easton, the free man, is alive,” sang his heart, “but Dolly’s husband is at the bottom of the sea!”

Chapter XIII: FREEDOM

IT is not easy to convey in a few words the turmoil of Jim's mind during the following days. One cannot say that he was the prey of his conscience, for he believed from the bottom of his heart that he was doing the best thing for Dolly, as well as for himself, in thus allowing the story of his murder to stand. His uncle had lived a double life, and thus had maintained a reputation for virtue. In Jim's case, he could not long have hidden from the eyes of his neighbours the wretchedness of his marriage, and there was no likelihood that he would have ever set a shining example of nobility to the village; and therefore his supposed extinction could be regarded as one of those pretences which are the basis of society.

Had there been any likelihood of his deception being found out, the case would have been different; but his death had been accepted absolutely, and he did not suppose that there would be any penetrating inquiries or investigations by the police now that the innkeeper had made his lying confession. He was completely "dead," nor would he ever have to come back to earth again, thereby upsetting any future arrangement of her life which his "widow" might make; for even if he were one day recognized by some English acquaintances he could always put any inquirer in the wrong by showing that he had been none other than "Jim Easton" these many years.

Yet the fear of detection, and the indefinite sense that he was acting in a manner violently opposed to those legalities which he did not understand, but whose existence he realized, kept him in a state of nervous tension and temporarily banished all peace from his mind. He was convinced that Dolly would not grieve for him; yet the manner of his death would be a shock to her, and there were two other persons—Mrs. Darling and Smiley-face—who would feel his loss. They would soon forget him, however.

He recalled Mrs. Spooner's angry words to him after that day when he had inadvertently interrupted her bicycle-ride: "You haven't much idea of obligation, have you?" This irresponsibility, of which people complained, was evidently growing upon him, he thought to himself; yet, viewing the matter from another angle, was he not now deliberately acting for the good of everybody concerned, in ending his unfortunate marriage and abandoning his inheritance?

His equanimity, however, gradually returned to him in some measure; and when at length he went back to Rome, and there settled himself comfortably in the obscure little hotel in the Trastevere quarter, he was already beginning at moments to feel a tremendous joy in his recovered liberty.

He knew that he was a deserter, and he was well aware that so he would be called by all nice-minded people. Yet that thought in itself did not trouble him; for the mental standpoint of the wanderer commands an outlook very different from that of the stout citizen. He saw clearly that he had not in

him the stuff of which a constitutional state or a model household is made. He could not be a party to so many of the hypocrisies of social life. He was not a good disciple of the Great Sham, and was so often inclined to "give the show away" when most the illusion ought to have been maintained. He was not a respectable member of the community, nor was he gifted with those methodical and enduring qualities which shape wedlock into a salubrious routine. Perhaps it was that he had too much imagination to be a good citizen, too much finesse to be a good husband. In any case he knew that he would never have been of use to his country, except, perhaps, as a pioneer in a small way (for the world-power of the Anglo-Saxon has been established by the rover and the free lance); or possibly as a sort of intellectual bagman, unconsciously exhibiting the lighter side of the race to foreign and critical eyes.

As the days passed he gave ever less consideration to his attitude, and soon his thoughts of Dolly and his English life had become sporadic and fleeting. Once, as he loitered in the sunny Piazza di Spagna upon a certain Sunday morning, and watched the good folk mounting the hot steps to the church of the Trinita de' Monti, he irritably argued the matter to himself as though anxious to exorcise it by arriving at some sort of finality. "Dolly will be far happier without me," he mused. "If I had left her, and was known to be alive, I should harm her by placing upon her the stigma most hateful to her sex—that of the unsuccessful wife. But since I am supposed to be dead, she will benefit trebly: she is rid of a bad husband; she will have the pleasure, very

real to her, of wearing mourning and nursing a fictitious sorrow; and she may set about the management of her life with a house and a comfortable fortune to add to her attractions. And then, again, from a public point of view, I have avoided the inevitable scandal of my married life by dying before I was driven to drink and debauchery. My memorial tablet in the church will be worth reading!"

His cogitations did not carry him further than this on the present occasion; for a number of white pigeons rose suddenly from the ground near his feet, and circled round the Egyptian obelisk which stands in front of the church, thereby directing his thoughts to the land of the Nile and to the life which he had led before he inherited Eversfield.

On another day, while he was seated in the shade of the trees in the Pincian Gardens, the passing carriages, in which the polite families of Rome were taking the air, led his thoughts back once more to these fading arguments and memories. "Now that I am dead," he reflected, "Dolly will at last be able to have the carriage-and-pair I had always refused to give her. She will be able to play the part of the little widow in the big carriage: yes!—that will please her far more than the presence of an untidy-looking husband."

It is to be understood, and perhaps it is to his credit, that he had given the loss of his inheritance never a thought, nor had cared how his money would be spent. He had nearly two thousand pounds in the bank, which was sufficient to provide for his modest needs for three or four years, and further than that he had no power to look. He did not

grudge Dolly the estate; and, indeed, so heartily had he come to dislike Eversfield and all it meant, that he could have wished his worst enemy no greater punishment than to be established there at the manor.

He gazed out through the arch of the trees to the dome of St. Peter's, rising above the distant houses on the far side of an open space of blazing sunlight; and he breathed a sigh of profound relief that a means of escape had been found from the cage of matrimony and domesticity in which he had been confined. "I used to think," he mused, "that it would be a wonderful thing to have a wife who would be my refuge and my sanctuary; but I see now that that was a delusion and a weakness. It is far better for a man to stand on his own two legs, and to make his own heart his place of comfort, and what he looks out on through its windows his entertainment." Yet even so, he was aware that this statement of the case did not cover the whole ground; for there certainly were times when he suffered from a sense of tremendous loneliness.

Then came the trial of the innkeeper, and for a short time he was obliged to return to the past; yet now he viewed matters with complete detachment: it was as though he were in no way identical with James Tundering-West, nor ever had been. He read in the papers, without a tremor, how his wife had identified the walking-stick, handkerchief, and postcard, which had been sent to England for the purpose of that formality. He was mildly relieved to find that his dealings with the diamonds had not been traced, and that his movements in France, and

his subsequent visit to Genoa and Pisa, were but roughly sketched in as having no bearing upon the actual crime. The innkeeper's declarations quite amused him, and he was hardly indignant to find that the man had become a popular figure, and that his sentence was wholly inadequate.

The close of the trial marked Jim's complete emancipation. With a wide mental gesture, which was very inadequately expressed by his twisted smile and the shrug of his shoulders, he dismissed the tale of his marriage from the history of his life, and turned his attention wholly to that all-embracing present, which is the true wanderer's domain. The "I was" and the "I shall be" of the citizen's domestic life was lost in the great "I am" of the vagabond. He was no longer the lord of a compact little estate, bounded by grey stone walls and green hedges. He was the squire vagrant; he was enfeoffed of the whole wide world.

In the first exultation of his final freedom he decided to leave Rome. The true vagrant does not move from place to place in conscious search of knowledge or experience: he has no purpose in his movements. He travels onwards merely to satisfy an undefined appetite for life. The difference between the real nomad and the ordinary traveller is this, that the latter passes with definite intent from one stopping-place to the next, and the intervening road is but the means of approach to a desired goal; but the nomad has no goal, or it might be said that the road itself is his goal.

In Jim's case—to use an illustrative exaggeration—if he were moving south, and the dust were to

blow in his face, he would turn and travel north. Thus, when he made his departure from Rome he took his direction almost at random. He had no ties, no duties, no cares. A knapsack upon his shoulders, and some loose change jingling in his pocket, a roll of notes stuffed into his wallet, and at least three languages ready to his tongue, he set out to range over his new estate, the world, having the feeling in his heart that he had come back to the freedom of youth from a misty prison of premature age which was already fast fading from his memory.

His route would be difficult to record and puzzling to follow. For days together he lingered at little inns where a few francs procured him excellent fare; now he passed on by road or rail, by river or lake, to new districts, and new settings for the comedy of his life; and now he came to rest under the awnings of some small hotel in the heart of a sun-bathed city.

During a spell of particularly hot weather he went north to Lake Maggiore, where, on the cool slopes of Mergozzolo, he spent a number of dreamy days at a little whitewashed inn, from whose terrace he could look down upon the lake and beyond it to the blue and hazy plains of Lombardy and Piedmont. He worked here on the polishing of his verses, writing also a longish poem upon the subject of freedom; and in the evenings he sat for hours under the stars, talking to the proprietor and his wife, or playing his guitar, and smoking the little cigarettes in which the Italian Government so wisely specializes.

One incident which occurred at this time may be

recorded. He was making a journey by train one piping-hot day, and was seated alone in a smoking compartment, which was connected by a door with another compartment where smoking was not permitted. During a long run between two stations this door was opened and another traveller entered, carrying a small portmanteau and a bundle of rugs. He was a stout, florid, prosperous-looking business man, whose English nationality was entirely obvious, and when he explained in very bad Italian that he was changing his seat in order to smoke a pipe, Jim answered him in his mother tongue, and soon they passed into casual conversation.

"People on these Italian railways," the stranger said, "seem to smoke in any carriage; but I, personally, feel that one ought to stick to the rules, and only do so in the compartments specially provided for the purpose."

"Quite right, I'm sure," Jim replied, having no pronounced views on the subject, but wishing to be polite.

"That is what these foreigners lack—a sense of neighborly duty," the man went on. "Don't you think so? I always feel that England is what she is because our people always consider the other fellow. We pull together and help each other."

He enlarged upon this subject, and was still citing instances in support of his argument, when the train pulled up at a small station, where a halt of ten minutes or so was announced by an official upon the platform. Thereupon a number of passengers alighted from the train and made their way through the blazing sunlight to a refreshment stall which

stood in the cool shade of a dusty tree in the station yard, just beyond the barriers.

Jim was in lazy mood, and did not join this throng of thirsty humanity; but his companion, who was feeling the heat, left his seat and followed the hurrying crowd.

At length the bell rang, and the guard blew his horn; and Jim, suddenly awakening from a reverie, became aware that his fellow traveller had not returned, and hastily leaned out of the window to see what had become of him. The driver sounded his whistle, and set the engine in motion; and at the same moment Jim saw a fat and frantic figure struggling to pass the barrier, and being held back by excited officials, who, it seemed, were refusing to allow him to attempt to board the moving train.

Jim waved his arm and received some sort of answering signal of distress. Instantly the thought flashed into his mind that here was an opportunity to display that sense of obligation of which they had spoken, and to aid a fellow creature in trouble. The man's baggage! He must throw it out of the train, so that, at any rate, the owner in his dilemma should not be separated from his belongings.

Snatching the portmanteau and the rugs from the seat where they rested, he pushed them through the window, and had the satisfaction of seeing them roll to safety upon the platform at the feet of a bewildered porter. Again he waved to the struggling man, and pointed repeatedly to the baggage with downward jabbing finger; then, having thus performed what he considered to be a most neighbourly act of quick-witted succour, he sank back into his

corner seat and laughed to himself at the incident.

A smile still suffused his face when, several minutes later, the door from the next compartment opened and the portly Englishman made his appearance.

"Warm lemonade," he remarked; "but it was better than nothing. A dam' pretty woman in the next carriage. I've been trying to talk to her, but it was no good: we can't understand each other."

Jim stared at him in horror, as at a ghost. "Then it wasn't you at the barrier?" he gasped in awe.

"What d'you mean?" the other asked. "Hullo, where's my baggage?"

Jim blanched. "I threw it out of the window," he said, swallowing convulsively.

"You did *what*?" the man exclaimed, staring at him in amazement.

"I thought," Jim stammered, "it was the most neighbourly thing to do; you see, I . . ." But the remainder of the sentence failed upon his dry lips, as the corpulent stranger rose up before him in the crimson fullness of his fury.

Never had Jim, in all his vicissitudes, been subjected to so overwhelming a bombardment of abuse; and though he managed at length to explain the mistake he had made, he failed thereby to check the passionate maledictions which spluttered and burst about his devoted head like fireworks. At last he could stand it no longer, and, rising slowly to his feet, he smote the stranger a blow upon the jaw which sent him reeling across the compartment, as the train came to a standstill at another station.

The man staggered to the door, and, tumbling out

on to the platform, shouted for help in a frenzied admixture of English, French, and Italian; but while a crowd of uncomprehending passengers and officials gathered around him, Jim opened the door at the opposite end of the carriage, and descended on to the deserted track. A moment later he had disappeared behind the wall of an adjacent shed, and soon was out on the high road, heading for his destination, which was yet some ten miles distant.

"That's enough of neighbourly duty for one day," he muttered, as he lit a cigarette.

A great part of August he spent amidst the woods of Monte Adamello, and in the Val Camonica; but, suddenly feeling a little bored, and having a desire for the sea, he made the long train-journey to Venice, and crossed the water to the Lido, where he bought himself a mad red-and-white bathing suit, and went daily into the sea with a crowd of merry Venetians.

The delights of the *Stabilimento dei Bagni*, however, did not long hold him in thrall. There was too much splashing and spitting; and, when the bathing hours were over for the day, the concert-hall and the open-air theatre offered a kind of entertainment which, owing to an unaccountable mood of discontent, soon began to pall. He therefore took ship across the Gulf of Venice to Trieste, and stayed for some days at a small hotel on the hillside towards Boschetto.

Here, one evening at dinner, he made the acquaintance of a ship's officer, who told him that on the morrow the steamer on which he was employed was sailing for Cyprus; and, without a

moment's hesitation, Jim decided to take passage by it to that island of romance. It was September, and the weather was cooling fast. He had had some vague idea of crossing the sea to the Levant; but now this new suggestion came to him with a surprisingly definite appeal.

"Of course, Cyprus!" he exclaimed. "The very place I have always wanted to visit. I had forgotten all about it."

He had read books, and had heard travellers' tales, about this wonderful land which rises from the blue waters of the eastern Mediterranean like a phantom isle of enchantment. Here the remains of temples dedicated to the old gods of Greece are to be seen: the mountain streams still resound at noon with the pipes of Pan; at sunset upon the sea-shore one may picture Aphrodite rising in her glory from the waves; and at midnight the barking of the dogs of Diana may be heard over the hills. The Crusaders endeavoured to establish a kingdom here on Frankish lines, and the place is full of the ruins of their efforts. The headlands are crested with crumbling baronial castles, and in the towns there still stand the walls of Gothic churches, wherein, at dead of night, they say that the ghostly chanting of hymns to the Blessed Virgin may be heard. Then came the Moslems; and to this day the call to prayer in the name of Allah synchronizes with the tolling of convent bells summoning the worshippers in the name of the Mother of Jesus, while the peasants, inwardly heedless of both, still make their little offerings at the traditional holy places of the gods of Olympus.

It is a land in which the movement of Time is forgotten, and in part it is a living remnant of the dead ages; and as such it had for long appealed to Jim's imagination. Straightway, therefore, he wrote a letter to his bankers in Rome telling them to forward him some money to the Post Office at Nicosia, the capital city; and twenty hours later he was standing on the deck of the small coasting steamer, watching the land receding from sight in a haze of afternoon heat.

On the sixth morning, as the sun was rising, the anchor rattled into the blue waters of the roadstead before Larnaca, the chief port of Cyprus; and, after an early breakfast, Jim was rowed in a small boat, manned by a Greek and a negro, towards the little town which stood white and resplendent in the sunshine, its cupolas, minarets, and flat-roofed houses backed by the vivid green of the palms and the saffron of the hills. He knew a few words of Greek, and a considerable amount of Arabic; and, with the aid of his friend the ship's officer, he had soon chartered the two-horse carriage in which he was to make the thirty-mile journey to Nicosia, the inland capital of the island.

The road passed across the bare, sunburnt uplands, and was flanked by scattered rocks, from which the basking lizards scampered as the carriage approached. Occasionally they passed a cart drawn by two long-horned bullocks, led by a scarlet-capped peasant; or a solitary shepherd driving his flock; or some cloaked and bearded rider upon a mule, jingling down to the coast. The glare of the road was great; but under the shelter of the dusty awning of

the carriage Jim was cool enough, and there was a refreshing following-wind blowing up from the sea, which tempered the autumn heat.

The time passed quickly, and it did not seem long before they lurched, with a great cracking of the driver's whip, into the half-way village of Dali. The second stage of the journey was more tedious, for now the novelty of the rugged scenery was gone, and the jolting of the rickety carriage was more noticeable. Jim was thankful, therefore, when, in the late afternoon, Nicosia came suddenly into sight, and the carriage presently rattled through the tunnelled gateway in the mediæval ramparts, and passed into the narrow and echoing streets of the city.

Here Greeks and Armenians, Arabs and Turks thronged the intricate thoroughfares; and as the driver made his way towards the Greek hotel, to which Jim had been recommended, there was much pulling at the mouths of the weary horses and much hoarse shouting. Now their passage was obstructed by an oxen-drawn cart, piled high with earthenware jars; now they seemed to be about to unseat a turbaned Oriental from his white steed; and now a group of Greek girls bearing pitchers upon their heads was scattered to right and left as the carriage lumbered round a corner. Here was a priest entering a Gothic doorway dating from the days of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, and upon the wall above him were carved the arms of some forgotten knight of Normandy; here a sheikh in flowing silks stood kicking off his shoes before the tiled entrance of a mosque. Here were noisy Turkish children playing before a building which recalled the age of the Venetian Re-

public; and here wild-eyed Cypriot peasants wrangled and argued as they had argued since those far-off days when Cleopatra's sister was queen of the island, and, ages earlier, when Phœnician seamen and the warriors of ancient Greece had held them in subjection.

At last the carriage pulled up in front of the white archway which led through a high, blank wall into the hotel; and presently Jim found himself in a quiet courtyard, where a tinkling fountain played amongst the orange-trees. The building was erected around the four sides of this secluded yard, the rooms leading off a red-tiled balcony, supported on a series of whitewashed arches, and approached by a flight of worn stone steps.

Up to this covered balcony he was led by the genial proprietor, a man with a fierce grey moustache which belied a fat and kindly face; and a room was assigned to him, from the door of which he could look down upon the fountain and the oranges, while from the window at the opposite end he commanded a short view across a jumble of flat housetops to a group of tall dark cypress trees, where the sparrows were chattering as they gathered to roost.

The walls of the room were whitewashed and were pleasantly devoid of pictures. It might have been a chamber in an ancient palace, and as Jim sat himself down upon the wooden bench he had the feeling that he had passed from the twentieth century into some period of the far past.

For some time there had been a vague kind of discontent in his mind. It was as though his life were incomplete. He seemed to be seeking for

something, the nature of which he could not define. At times he had thought that this was due to a desire for romance, a natural urge of sex; but, on the other hand, his reason told him that he had had enough of women, and that his present emancipation was in essence very largely a freedom from them.

Now, however, in the dusk of this quiet room, his heart seemed of a sudden to be at rest; and when from a distant minaret there came to his ears the evening call to prayer, a sense of inevitability, a kind of acknowledgment of *Kismet*, or Fate, passed over him and soothed him into a hopeful and expectant peacefulness.

He was still in this tranquil mood when the summons to the evening meal brought him down the stone steps and across the courtyard, where the ripe oranges hung from the trees, and the fountain splashed. It was with quiet, dawdling steps, too, that he strolled out, hatless, into the narrow street after the meal was finished. The night was warm and close, with the moon at full; and the pale deserted thoroughfare was hushed as though it were concealing some secret. The barred windows and shut doors of the houses seemed to hide unspoken things, and the two or three passers-by, moving like shadows near to the wall, gave the impression that they were bent upon some mysterious mission.

Here and there between the houses on either side small gardens were hidden away behind high white-washed walls, above which the tops of the trees could be seen. The door of one of these stood open, and Jim, standing in the middle of the empty street,

paused to gaze through the white archway into the shadows and sprinkled moonlight beyond.

Then, quietly into the frame of the doorway there came the figure of a woman, peering out into the street, the moon shining upon her face and upon her white hand, which held the door as though she were about to shut it for the night. On the instant, and with a leap of his heart, Jim recognized her.

"Monimé!" he cried out in amazement, running forward to her. He saw her raise her arm to her forehead and step back into the shadow: he could hear her gasp of surprise. A moment later he had taken her hand in his, and her startled eyes had met his own.

Chapter XIV: THE ISLAND OF FORGETFULNESS

MONIMÉ!" he repeated. "Don't you know me? I'm Jim—Jim Easton."

For a moment yet she did not speak. He could feel her hand trembling a little in his, and the movement of her breast revealed the haste of her breathing. She leaned back against the jamb of the door, and her eyes turned towards the garden behind her, as though she were contemplating flight into its shadows.

When at last she spoke, her words came rapidly. "Why have you come to Cyprus?" she asked passionately; and the sound of her voice brought a half-forgotten Alexandrian night racing back to his consciousness. "You couldn't have known I was here, and nobody knows who I am. How did you find out where I lived?" She moved her head from side to side in a kind of anguish which he did not understand. "I don't know that there is any need for you in the Villa Nasayan."

"Nasayan?" he repeated, in query. "Is that the name of this house?" She nodded her head. "That's the Arabic for 'Forgetfulness,' " he said. "Why did you give it such a name?"

Her answer faltered. The serenity with which he associated her in his memory had temporarily left her. "There was much to forget," she replied, "and much has been forgotten. Cyprus is called 'The

Island of Forgetfulness.' It is wonderful how bad one's memory becomes here."

She laughed nervously, and again put her hand to her head. The fingers of her other hand drummed upon the wall. "Why have you come?" she repeated.

"There was no reason," he said. "I just thought I'd like to see Cyprus. I had no idea you were here. I only arrived to-day: I was just strolling about after dinner . . ."

"It's more than four years," she murmured. "Four years is a very long time. It was all so long ago, Jim, wasn't it? Nobody can remember things as long ago as that, can they?"

She withdrew her hand from his, and stood staring at him with a baffling half-smile upon her lips. His heart sank, for it seemed to him that she was not minded to revive that dream of the past which to him had suddenly leapt once more into vivid reality.

"I have never forgotten," he whispered, though he knew that the words needed qualification. "I knew it was you, almost before I saw your face." He hesitated. "May I come into your garden?"

She allowed him to enter, and closed the door behind him. Together they walked in silence to a stone bench which stood in the moonlight beneath a dark cypress-tree; and here they seated themselves, side by side.

For a while they talked; but it was a sort of fencing with words, he thrusting and she parrying. He did not know what he said; for all his actual consciousness went out to her, not through speech, but through a kind of contact of their hidden hearts.

Then, without further preliminaries, she turned on him. "You say you have never forgotten," she laughed. "But when you say that you are deceiving yourself, or trying to deceive me. I don't like to hear you making conventional remarks, Jim: I have always thought of you as frank to the point of rudeness. Be frank with me now, and admit that you regarded our time together as a little episode in your wandering life, and that you went on your way without another thought for me . . ."

He interrupted her. "Was that how you felt about me?—you forgot me, too, didn't you?"

"With a woman it is different," she replied. "One is not always able to forget so soon."

"But why didn't you tell me your name, or give me some address?" he asked. "I wrote to you from the ship: I posted the letter at Marseilles. Didn't you get it?"

"No," she answered. "I stayed on at the Beaux-Esprits for a week or so, but nothing came. I left an address when I went away: I'm sure I did."

He laughed. "I think you must have forgotten to. We are both just tramps . . ."

She made a gesture of deprecation. "At first I wanted to find you again very badly," she said, turning her face from him. "I made inquiries, but nobody seemed to know anything about you. I remembered you said you'd inherited some property, and I even got a friend in England to look up recent wills and bequests for the name of Easton, but no trace could be found. Then, somehow, it didn't seem to matter any more, and I told him not to look for you further."

"Then you did care . . .?"

"Who can tell?" she smiled, and her words baffled him, as did also the expression of her face in the moonlight.

"Why didn't you tell me your name?" he asked. "I don't yet know it."

She looked at him in surprise. "My name is still 'Smith,' " she laughed.

"I don't believe you," he answered.

She shrugged her shoulders. "They all know me as that in this place—just 'Mrs. Smith.' "

"It used to be *Miss* Smith," he said.

"One causes less comment as a married woman," she explained. "Such friends as I have suppose that I am a widow who, being an artist, has come to live here because of the picturesqueness of the place and its cheapness."

"And what is the real reason?" he asked, looking intently into her eyes.

Of a sudden she rose from the bench, and stood before him, her back to the moon, the light of which made a shining aureole round her hair. Her left hand was laid across her breast; the other was clenched at her side.

"Jim, I beg you . . ." she said. "This is the Island of Forgetfulness, and you have strayed here, bringing Memory with you. There is no need for you in Nasayan. For my sake, for your own sake, go, I beg you. There is something here which we have in common, and yet which separates us: something which to me is a garland of Paradise, and which to you might be like the chains of hell. I beg you, I beg you: go away! Go back to the open road

and the Bedouin life. Leave me in Nasayan, in oblivion. I don't want you to know more than this. I swear to you there is no call for you to stay. You have your wandering life: the hills and the valleys and the cities of the whole world are before you. Don't stay here, don't try to look into Nasayan . . ."

Her voice faltered, her gestures were those of pleading, yet even so she appeared to him to have that regal attitude which he remembered now so well.

The meaning of her words, the cause of their intensity, were obscure to him. His mind was confused, and there was a quality of dream in their situation. The black cypress trees which shot up around them into the pale sky like monstrous sentinels; the little orange-trees fantastically decked with their golden fruit; the tiled and moon-splashed pathways; the white walls of the villa, clad with rich creepers; the heavy scent of luxuriant flowers; the sparkling water in the marble basin of the fountain—all these things seemed unreal to him. They were like a legendary setting for the mysterious figure standing before him, a figure, so it seemed to him, of a queen of some kingdom of the old world, left solitary amongst the living long ages after her advisers and her palaces had crumbled to dust in the grasp of Time.

"I don't understand," he said, rising and confronting her. "What is the secret about you?—there was always mystery around you."

"No," she answered. "There was no mystery four years ago, except the mystery of our dream. My secret then was only a small matter. I was just a runaway. I had left my husband because I wanted

my freedom, and to follow my art in freedom. I had changed my name because I feared to be called back. But now he is dead, and I have nothing to fear in that direction. . . . No, there was no secret—then.”

“But now?—please tell me, Monimé,” he urged. “I want to know, I *must* know.”

Once more she fenced with him, and their words became useless. At length, however, his questions brought a crisis near to them again. She clenched and unclenched her hands. “I beg you, go away now,” she urged. “Forget me; go back to your freedom. There is something here which will trap you if you stay. Oh, can’t you understand? Don’t you see that I can’t tell whether Fate has brought you here for your happiness, or even for my happiness, or whether it is for our sorrow that you have been brought. I can’t tell, I can’t tell! We are almost strangers to one another.”

He put his arms about her and held her to him. She neither shrank from him, nor responded to him. At that moment all else in time, all else in life, was blotted from his mind, and he knew only that he had found again the lost gateway of his dreams.

“You must speak out,” he cried. “I must know all that there is to know about you. You must explain what you mean.”

She made a movement from him, and suddenly it seemed that her mind was resolved. “Very well, then,” she said. “Come with me into the house.”

She led the way in silence down the pathway, and through a doorway almost hidden beneath the

creepers. A dark passage, screened by a curtain, led into a square hall, softly lit by candles; and at one side of this a stone staircase passed up to a gallery from which two doors opened.

To one of these doors she brought him, a shaded candle held in her hand. Her face was turned from him as they entered the room, and he could not tell what her expression might be; but her step was stealthy and her finger was held up.

Then, suddenly, as in a flash, he understood; and instantly he knew what he was going to see in the little bed which stood against the wall.

She held the candle aloft and motioned him silently to approach the bed. It was only a mop of dark curls that he could see, and a chubby face half buried in the pillows.

He turned to her with a burning question on his lips, but the beating of his heart seemed to deprive him of the power of speech. She nodded gently to him, her face once more serene and calm, and now, too, very proud.

"He is your son," she said.

With a quick eager movement he pulled the light blanket back, and snatched up the sleeping little figure in his arms. Even though the eyes were tight shut, the mouth absurdly open, and the head falling loosely from side to side, he saw at once the likeness to himself, and to all the Tundering-Wests at whose portraits he had gazed during those years at Eversfield. His heart leapt within him.

"Don't wake him!" she exclaimed, hastening forward; and as she laid the child upon the bed once more Jim saw her revealed in a new aspect—that of

a mother. Her attitude as she bent over the sleeping form, the encircling, protecting arms, the crooning words—they were tokens of a sort of universal motherhood. She was Isis, the mother-goddess of Egypt; she was Hathor; she was Venus Genetrix; she was Mary. Upon her broad bosom she nursed for ever the child of man; and her lips smiled eternally with the pride of creation.

Silently he watched her as she smoothed the pillows, and there came to him the memory of that day at Alexandria when he had awakened from unconsciousness to find her leaning over him, her hand upon his forehead; and suddenly he seemed to understand the nature of one of the veils of mystery which enwrapped her, and which, indeed, enwraps all women who are true to their sex. It is the veil which hangs before the sanctuary of motherhood aglow with the inner illumination of the everlasting wisdom of maternity.

An overwhelming emotion shook his life to its foundations: he could have gone down on his knees and kissed the hem of her garment. He could not trust himself to speak, but silently he took her hand in his and pressed it to his dry lips.

She led him out of the room and down the stairs; and presently they were seated once more upon the bench in the moonlight. In answer to his eager questions, she told him in a low voice how she had hidden herself in Constantinople when her time was approaching, and how the baby was born in a convent-hospital. She had found in the city an English nurse, the widow of a soldier, and at length with her

she had taken ship to Cyprus, and had rented this house.

"I want you to understand," she said, "that there is no obligation of any kind upon you. Here in Nicosia there are a few English people: they have received me without question, and I am not lonely. I send my pictures to London from time to time, and the money I receive for them is ample for my needs. When my boy is a little older I will take him to some place in Italy or France where he can be educated and I can paint. Don't think that there is any call upon you: don't feel that here is a chain to bind you . . ."

He stopped her with an excited gesture. "You don't understand. This is the most wonderful thing that could possibly have happened to me. I want you to let me stay on at the hotel, and come over to see you every day. . . . May I come to-morrow morning?—I must see that boy when he's awake. My son! He's my son! Good Lord!—I've never felt so all up in the air before."

A sudden thought frenzied him. If only he had known her address, or she had known his, his disastrous marriage would never have taken place. He would have married Monimé, and ultimately this little son of theirs would have been the Tundering-West of Eversfield Manor. But now, the boy was nameless, and the inheritance was gone as the price of freedom.

"Oh, Monimé," he cried. "How can you ever forgive me? Oh, why, why didn't I cable to you after I left Egypt?—why didn't we keep in touch?"

He paced to and fro, running his fingers through

his dark hair and pulling at it so that it fell over his forehead. His eyes were wild, and his face looked white and haggard in the moonlight.

"The fault was as much mine as yours," she declared. "It was just Bedouin love, and we let it slip from us. We dreamed our dreams, and in the morning we went our ways, like the tramps that we are. And then when I found that I had need of you, it was too late . . ."

"But now we must make up for it," he said. "We must never lose each other again. I love you, Monimé. I believe I have always loved you, somewhere at the back of my mind."

She smiled the wise smile of the old gods. "It was four years ago," she said, "and our little dream was so short. In a way we are strangers to one another."

Presently she rose, and told him that he must go. "The hotel keeps early hours," she said.

She led him to the door of the garden, but to his fervent adieux she gave no great response. The expression on her face was placid once more, and his excited senses could make nothing of it.

He walked down the silent, mediæval street oblivious to his surroundings. Behind a shuttered window there were sounds of the rhythmic beating of a tambourine and the twanging of some sort of stringed instrument; but he heeded them not. A cloaked and hooded figure, leaning upon a staff, passed him, and bade him "Good-night" in Arabic; but he did not respond. He entered the hotel, and walked up the steps to his bedroom without any real consciousness of his actions.

His whole being was, as it were, in an uproar, and

his emotions were playing riot with his reason. He had chanced again upon the woman he had loved and almost forgotten, the woman he ought to have married; and suddenly the great miracle had been wrought within him, and he was deeply, wildly, madly in love with her. She was the mother of his son—his son, his son, his son!

Over and over again, he repeated it to himself, and the words seemed to go roaring like a tempest through the crowded halls of his thoughts. But presently, as he sat upon the foot of his bed, new whirlwinds of actuality came to the assault, and scattered the shouting multitude of his dreams.

If he married Monimé he would be a bigamist, and within the reach of the law. If he told her that he was married he might lose her for ever. Even if he kept his real identity a secret, and risked detection, the fact remained that he had thrown away his home and his fortune, and had nothing in prospect when his present means were exhausted.

For the first time since the early days of his inheritance he realized the value of the property to which he had succeeded, he realized the merit of the name he had abandoned. In later years how could he ever look his son in the face, and tell him of the home and income that had been thrown away? Yet if he kept his secret, how could he endure to live daily to Monimé a fundamental lie?

Bitterly he reproached himself for his past actions. Bitterly he cursed Dolly for her part in the dilemma. There seemed no way out of the mess; and far into the night he sat with his head resting upon his hands, his fingers deep in his hair.

Chapter XV: WOMAN REGNANT

TO Jim the days which followed were chaotic. The whole movement of his existence seemed to be stimulated and speeded up, and the pace of his thoughts was increased out of all measure. It was as though some sort of drag or break had been removed from the wheels of his being, so that the fiery steeds of circumstance were able to leap forward after many a mile of heavy going. From now henceforth he was conscious of a general acceleration, a new vehemence, even a sort of frenzy in his progress along the high road of life; and, in consequence, his impressions were received with less observation of detail.

In the high passion of love there is no peace of mind and little satisfaction. The lover can never believe that he is loved, yet his happiness seems to him to depend on that assurance. His anxiety haunts him, fevers him, and lays siege as it were to his very soul.

The true lover makes more abundant acquaintance with hell than with heaven. So sensitive is his condition that every moment not rich with his lady's obvious adoration is a moment impoverished by doubts and fears. She is not so interested in him as she was, he thinks; she is bored; she is cold to-day; she is thinking of something else; she does not surrender herself impetuously as she would if she really

cared. So says the wretched lover in his heart, and so he gives himself over to the legion of ten thousand devils.

Monimé maintained towards Jim a quiet and tantalizing reserve. Mentally she seemed to be upon the mountain-top, and he in the valley below. When he visited her at her house she kept him waiting before she made her appearance: it was as though she were not eager to see him. Women have this in common with the feline race: they seem so often to be intent upon some hidden pursuit. They go their own way, bide their own time, and no man may know the secret of their doings. No man may be initiated into their mysteries; and that which occupies them upstairs before they descend to greet him is beyond his ken.

Like a number of men, Jim's character was marked by a certain simplicity. He made no secret of his love: it was apparent in his every gesture. The only secret which he maintained was that of his marriage, lest he should lose her, and in this regard he lied to an extent which brought misery to his heart. He gave her to understand that the property he had inherited had proved to be of no great value, and that the little money he now possessed was all that remained of its proceeds.

He desired to forget the years at Eversfield utterly, and to live only in the present. To Monimé he had always been Jim Easton, and the fact that she had not so much as heard the names Tundering-West or Eversfield aided him in his deception. Yet in his own heart his marriage to Dolly and the change of identity by which he had effected his

escape were become the two appalling mistakes which shut him off from Monimé and their son.

The little boy proved to be all that he could wish. He was about three and a-half years of age, and was in the midst of that first great phase of inquiry which is the introduction to the school of life. He used the word "why" a hundred times a day; his large eyes stared in wondering contemplation at every object which newly came into his ken; and his fingers were ever busy with experiment.

It is a trying age for the "grown-up"; but Jim, not having too much of it, enjoyed it, and enjoyed watching Monimé's handling of the situation.

Her attitude towards himself during the first days, however, was the cause of many a heartache. There was a curious expression on her face as she watched him playing with the boy: it was at first as though she did not recognize his parental position, nor regard him as being in any way essential to the domestic alliance. She seemed to be anxious as to his influence upon the child, and when once he made the jesting assertion that parents should not try to be a good example to their offspring, but rather an awful warning, she did not laugh.

The possession of a son was the source of the most intense satisfaction to him; but Monimé seemed at first to be endeavouring to check his belated enthusiasm. Sometimes she appeared to him, indeed, as a lioness protecting her cub from an interfering lion, and cuffing the intruder over the head with a not too gentle paw. She seemed to claim the boy as her own exclusive property, and she allowed Jim no free access to the nursery, nor

indeed to the house. There were days upon which the door was closed to him on one pretext or another; and at such times he experienced a variety of emotions, all of which were violent and passionate.

"People will talk," she would say, "if you come here so often, Jim. I am not independent of the world as I used to be: I have the boy to consider."

She had called the child Ian, which, she said, was the name of her father; and the fact that she had thus excluded him from a nomenclatural identity with the boy was a source to him of recurrent mortification. His son should have been James, or Stephen, or Mark, like his ancestors before him: it filled his heart with bitter remorse that the little chap should be merely "Ian Smith."

Gradually, however, Monimé became more accustomed to his association with the boy; and at length there came a memorable occasion on which they sat together beside his cot for the best part of the night and nursed him through an alarming feverish attack. It was then that Jim saw in her face an expression of tenderness towards him which was like water to the thirsty.

"You know," he said to her, as they walked in the garden together in the cool of the daybreak, "this is the first time you have let me feel that I have anything to do with Ian. I have been very hurt."

She turned on him vehemently. "Oh, don't you understand," she said, "that your coming back into my life like this is very hard for me to bear? I don't want you to feel yourself tied down. I am perfectly capable of looking after myself and my

boy without your help. You have set a struggle going in my mind that is distracting me. There is one side of me which resents your interference, because you are just a wanderer, perfectly capable of walking off once more with hardly a farewell. There is another side which finds a sort of sneaking comfort in your presence, and endows you with virtues you probably don't possess. I was self-reliant until you came. Now I am swayed this way and that. At one moment I think I was wrong, and that we ought to be married and ought to go to some country where we are unknown, so that we can explain our child by pretending our marriage took place secretly four years ago. At another moment I remember that you have not suggested marriage to me, and that therefore you probably realize as well as I do your unfittedness for the rôle of husband. And then there's the constant feeling of the unfairness of making you share, at this stage, the responsibilities I undertook of my own free will at Alexandria."

"It was my doing as much as yours," he replied.

"No," she answered, with a smile. "Any woman worth her salt handles those sorts of situations, and makes up her own mind. Man proposes, woman disposes. The whole thing is in the woman's hands: to think otherwise is to insult my sex. Men and women are both pieces in Nature's game; but Nature is a woman, and she works out her plans through her own sex."

She sat down upon the stone bench, and, with hands folded, gazed up to the dawning glory of the sunrise. It was as though she were a conscious

daughter of Hathor, Mother of all things, looking for guidance in her perplexity. Jim seated himself by her side, and for some time there was silence between them, though his brain seemed to him to be full of the clamour of shackled words and incarcerated emotions.

Her reference to their marriage had pierced his heart as with a sharp sword. He desired to make her his wife more intensely than ever he had desired anything in his life before; yet he was unable to do so. He wanted to possess her, to have the right to protect her, to be able to dedicate his whole entity to her service; yet he was tied hand and foot, and could make no such proposal.

He felt ashamed, exasperated, and thwarted; and suddenly springing to his feet, he swung about on his heel, kicked viciously at the bushes, and swore a round, hearty oath.

"What's the matter?" she asked in surprise. "Has something stung you?"

He laughed crazily. "Yes, I'm stung all over," he cried. "There are a hundred serpents with all their flaming fangs in me. I think I'm going mad."

He paced to and fro, tearing at his hair; and when at length he resumed his seat he seized both her hands in his, and frenziedly kissed her every finger.

"I'm on fire," he gasped. "I believe my heart is a roaring furnace. I must be full of blazing light inside; and in a few minutes I think I shall drop down dead with longing for you, Monimé. Then you'll have to bury me; but I tell you there'll be a volcanic eruption above my grave, and flames will

issue forth from my bare bones. I don't believe Death itself could extinguish me: my love will burst out in fearful torrents of lava, and the whole earth will tremble at my convulsions. I shall come to you again in earthquakes and tidal waves and a falling rain of comets. I shall blow the whole blasted world to smithereens before I go roaring into hell. . . . That's how I feel! That's what you've done to me!"

He took her in his arms, and, holding her crushed and powerless to resist, poured out his love for her in wild desperate words, his face close to hers. The sun was rising, and the first rays of golden light were flung upon the tops of the surrounding houses and trees while yet the garden was blue with the shadow of the vanishing night.

"Don't Jim," she whispered. "For God's sake, don't! We've got to be sensible. We've got to think what's best for Ian. Give me a chance to think."

"I want you," he cried. "I want you more than any man has ever wanted anything. You belong to me: you're my wife in the eyes of God. I want you to marry me . . ."

He had said it!—he had uttered the impossible thing; and his heart stood still with anguish. His arms loosened their hold upon her, and they faced one another in silence, while a thousand sparrows in the tree-tops chattered their merry morning salutation to the sun.

"Cad! Cad! Cad!" said the voice of his outraged conscience to him. "Bigamist and thief!"

And his heart responded with the one reiterated excuse: "I love her, I love her!"

"You must give me time to think," she said at length. "Go now, Jim. You must have some sleep, and I must see to Ian."

For two days after this she would not see him, but on the third day, at mid-morning, he found himself once more in her drawing-room. It was a charming room, cool and airy; and it had a distinction which his own drawing-room at Eversfield had lamentably lacked. Dolly had been a victim of the nepotistic practice of loading the tables, piano-top, and shelves with photographs of herself, her friends, and her relatives. Pictures of this kind are well enough in a man's study or a woman's boudoir; but in the more public rooms they are only to be tolerated, if at all, in the smallest quantity. Monimé, however, whether by design or by force of circumstances, was free of this habit; and the more subtle essence of her personality was thus able to be enjoyed without distraction.

The walls were whitewashed and panelled with old Persian textiles; carpets of Karamania and Smyrna lay upon the stone-paved floors; the light furniture was covered with fine fabrics of local manufacture; and in Cyprian vases a mass of flowers greeted the eye with a hundred chromatic gradations and scented the air with the fragrance of summer.

Monimé, upon this occasion, had reverted to her accustomed serenity of manner; and as she refreshed her distracted lover with sandwiches of goat's-milk cheese and the wine of the island poured

from a Cyprian jug, she talked to him quietly of practical things.

She argued frankly for and against their marriage, and reviewed the financial aspect of the question without embarrassment. She told him that she had just received a proposal from her salesman in London that she should go over to Egypt at once and paint him a dozen desert subjects, there being a readier market for these than for pictures of little-known Cyprus. This, therefore, she intended to do; and, in view of Ian's health, she proposed to send the boy and his nurse to England, there to await her return in four or five months' time.

Jim moved restlessly in his chair as she spoke, for the thought of revisiting England was terrifying to him; yet if she went there he could hardly resist the temptation to follow. He knew that it was preposterous enough to think of a bigamous marriage to her, even here in the East, but in England such a union would be madness.

"I thought," he said gloomily, "that you did not want to risk meeting your former friends."

"What does it matter now?" she replied. "The scandal of my leaving my husband is forgotten, and he, poor man, is dead. I have never told you his name, have I? He was Richard Furnice, the banker."

Jim glanced up quickly. "I know the name," he said, with simplicity, for who did not? "But I don't remember ever reading of his domestic troubles."

"No," she replied. "The scandal was kept out of the papers. He was as successful in explaining

away my absence as he had been in explaining away the presence of his mistress. Yes," she added, in answer to his look of inquiry, "he led the usual double life."

"Very rich, wasn't he?" Jim asked.

"Yes, very," she answered. "But I have never cared much about money. I have always agreed with the man who said 'Wealth is acquired by over-reaching our neighbors, and is spent in insulting them.'"

"I like money well enough," said Jim, "but I've never been much good at earning it."

She asked him why he did not send some of his verses to a publisher in England, and talked to him so persuasively in this regard that he promised to consider doing so.

"But if you return to England," he said, returning to the problem before him, "are there none of your relations who will make it awkward for you and Ian?"

She shook her head. "My father died several years ago, and I was the only child. We have no close relations. You now may as well know his name, too. He was Sir Ian Valory, the African explorer."

Jim looked at her in surprise. "Why, he was one of my heroes as a boy," he declared. "I read his books over and over again. This is wonderful!—tell me more."

But as she did so, there arose a new clamour in his brain. He longed to be able to tell her that his own blood was fit to match with hers. The Thundering-Wests stood high in the annals of exploration

and adventure: his ancestors had roamed the world, as Knights of the Cross, as King's Envoys, as Constables of frontier castles, as Admirals of England. He himself was blood of their blood, and bone of their bone; and his son combined this high heritage with that of Valory.

Yet the secret must be kept. Bitter was his regret that so it must be, thrice bitter his remorse that this son of his was a bastard. A Tundering-West and a Valory!—and the issue of that illustrious union a child without a name, hidden away in the Island of Forgetfulness!!

He went back to the hotel that day cursing Fate for its irony, hating himself for a fool. Then, of a sudden, there came a possible solution into his bewildered thoughts. Monimé was going to Egypt for some months: could he not return to England, reveal the fact of his existence to his wife, and oblige her to divorce him? The proceedings could be conducted quietly, and Monimé, unaware of his real name, would not identify him with them. He could return to her a free man, able to marry her, and in later years he could tell her the whole story.

Yet how could he bear the long absence from her, how could he face the terror that she might find out and reject him? "O God," he cried in his heart, "I am punished for my foolishness! You have belaboured me enough: You, Whom they call merciful, have mercy!"

During the next few days Jim made a final arrangement of his poems, and, adding a title-page: *Songs of the Highroad*, by James Easton, posted them off to a well-known publisher in London, giving

his bank in Rome as his address. While reading through these collected manuscripts he had come to the conclusion that the poems were rather good. "There's quite a swing about some of the stuff," he said to Monimé. "In fact I almost believe I could have shown you one or two of them without feeling an ass. But I suppose the thoughts in them, and the melancholy speculations about what is one's 'duty' and all that sort of thing, are rather rot."

As time passed, the idea of returning to England and obtaining a divorce developed in his mind. He was reluctant, however, to make a final decision, and his plans remained fluid long after those of Monimé had crystallized. This was due mainly to the suspense he was experiencing in regard to his relations with her. He avoided any pressing of the question of their marriage, for he shunned the thought of involving her in a possible bigamy case; yet he could see that so long as he maintained this inconclusive attitude he gave her no cause for confidence in him.

Matters came to a head one day at the end of October. Monimé had arranged with him to make the excursion to the mountain castle of St. Hilarion; and it is probable that both he and she had decided to talk things out during the hours they would be together. So far as he was concerned, at any rate, the situation as it stood was impossible.

The carriage in which they were to make this fifteen-mile journey resembled a barouche, but a kind of awning was stretched above it on four iron rods, and from this depended some dusty-looking curtains looped back by faded red cords and tassels,

which might have been purloined from old men's dressing-gowns. Four lean and crazily harnessed horses were attached to this vehicle, which looked somewhat like a four-poster bed on wheels; and a red-capped and baggy-trouserer driver, apparently of Turkish nationality, sat high upon the box, Monimé's man-servant being perched beside him.

Rattling down the narrow streets of the city and through the tunnel in the ramparts, they soon passed out into the open country, and, with loudly cracking whip, bowled along the sun-bathed road at a very fair pace, the sparkling morning air seeming to put vigour even into the emaciated horses.

At length they came to the foot-hills, and saw far above them, against the intense blue of the sky, the pass which leads through the mountains to the port of Kyrenia and the sea. Here their pace grew slower, and from time to time they walked beside the labouring vehicle as it crunched its way through soft gravel and sand, or lurched over half-buried boulders.

Reaching level ground once more they went with a fine flourish through a village where the dogs barked at them and the children stared or ran begging at their side. Now the slopes and ledges of rock were green with young pines, whose aromatic scent filled the warm air; and, as they slowly wound their way upwards, the size of these trees increased until they attained truly majestic proportions.

Towards noon they entered the pass, and Jim and Monimé were afoot once more, whilst the tired horses rested. Behind them the gorges and valleys carried the eye down into the hazy distances, and

they could see Nicosia lying like a white cameo upon the velvet of the plains. Before them a cleft in the towering rocks revealed the azure expanse of the Mediterranean, and beyond it the far-off coasts of Asia Minor, rising like the vision of a dream from the placid ocean.

Monimé shaded her eyes as she gazed over the sea. "There is Phrygia," she exclaimed, "where Monimé lived, and Cappadocia and Cilicia! And away behind them is Pontus, the land her husband took her to . . ."

"I have no home to take you to, Monimé," he said, unable to eschew the hazardous subject of their marriage.

"That's just as well," she answered, "because in the story, you remember, he involved her in his domestic troubles, which led to his suicide, and her own death followed."

She smiled as she spoke, but to him her words were dark with portentous meaning. He felt like a criminal.

Entering the carriage once more, they descended from the pass for some distance, as though making for Kyrenia, which they could see far below them; but presently a rough track led them through the pines, and brought them at last to the foot of a tremendous bluff of rock, upon the summit of which stood the ruined walls and towers of the castle of St. Hilarion. Here the carriage was abandoned, and hand-in-hand they clambered up the track, the servant following with the luncheon basket.

Soon they passed within the ruinous walls of the castle, and, having rested in the shade and eaten

their picnic meal, made their way amongst fallen stones and a profusion of weeds and grasses towards the main buildings, which mounted up the cliffs in front of them in a confused array of walls and turrets, roofs and chimneys, battlements and bastions, standing silent and withered in a blaze of sunlight.

Through a crumbling door they went, and up a flight of broken steps; through the ruined chapel, on the walls of which the faded frescoes could still be seen; along a shadowed passage, and up again by a rock-hewn stairway; until at last they reached a roofless chamber locally known as the Queen's Apartment.

This side of the castle, which was built at the edge of an appalling precipice, seemed to be clinging perilously to the summit of the mountain; and through the broken tracery of the Gothic windows they looked down in awe to the pine forests two thousand feet below. All about them the bold mountain peaks rose up from the shadowed and mysterious valleys near the coastline; and before them the purple and azure sea was spread, divided from the cloudless sky by the hazy hills of Asia Minor.

From these valleys there rose to their ears the frail and far-off tinkle of goats' bells, and sometimes the song of a shepherd was lifted up to them upon the tender wings of the breeze. All visible things seemed to be motionless in the warmth of the afternoon, with the exception only of two vultures, which slowly circled in mid-air with tranquil pinions extended. It was as though the crumbling

stones of the castle, and the forests and valleys they surmounted, were deep in an enchanted slumber, from which they would never again awake.

Here at these walls Richard Cœur de Lion, King of England, with trumpets had summoned the garrison to surrender; but the walls remembered it no more. Here the Kings and Queens of Cyprus, of the House of Lusignan, had held their court in that strange admixture of Western chivalry and Eastern splendour which had characterized the dynasty; but the glamour of those days was passed into oblivion. Here the soldiers of Venice had looted and plundered; but the ruin they left behind them had steeped its wounds in the balm of forgetfulness.

Only Monimé and her lover were awake in this place of dreams. Seated here, as it were, upon a throne rising in the very centre of the ancient world, she seemed to Jim to be one with all the dim, forgotten queens of the past; all the romance of all the pages of history was focussed and brought again to life in her person; and in her face there was the mystery of regnant womanhood throughout the ages.

Just as now she sat with her chin resting upon her hand, gazing over the summer seas to the adventurous coasts of the ancient kingdoms of the Mediterranean, so Arsinoë had gazed, perhaps upon this very mountain-top; so Cleopatra, her sister, had gazed, over there in her Alexandrian palace; so Helen had gazed yonder from the casements of Troy; so the Queen of Sheba, camping upon Lebanon, had gazed as she travelled from Jerusalem. The past was forgotten; but, all unknowing, it lived again in Monimé, enticing him with her lips, looking

tenderly upon him with her eyes, beckoning him with her smiles, repulsing him with her indifference, bewildering him with her serenity, maddening him with her unfathomable heart.

"Monimé, I can't go on like this," he said, taking her hands in his. "You must tell me here and now that you love me, or that I am to go out of your life."

"The future lies in your hands, Jim," she answered, quietly and with deep sincerity. "Surely you can understand my attitude. I will not bind myself to a man who will not be bound, even though I were to love him with all my soul."

"I have asked you to marry me," he told her.

"Your words carried no conviction," she replied.

"I ask you again," he said, daring all.

"You do not know what you are saying," she answered. "Go away to England, or to Italy, Jim, and think it over. Stay away from me for some months; and if you find that your feelings do not change, if I remain a vital thing in your life and do not fade into a memory, then you can come back to me, knowing that I will not fail you. We have had enough of Bedouin love. If I were to be honest with myself I would tell you that long ago circumstances made me realize that we did wrong at Alexandria, because we were unfair to the unborn generation. I set myself in opposition to accepted custom, and I have been beaten by just one thing—my anxiety for the welfare of the child my emancipation brought me, my terror in case there should be a slur upon his name. There must be no more playing with vital things."

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Her suggestion that he should go away from her for some months, while she worked in Egypt on her desert pictures, came to him like the voice of Providence, offering to him the opportunity to carry out his plan for ridding himself once and for all of Dolly by divorce; and his mind was made up on the instant.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go away—though not because I feel the slightest doubt about my love for you. I'll go to Larnaca to-morrow: some people from the hotel are going then, so as to catch the steamer the day after . . ."

She interrupted him. "Oh Jim, must it be to-morrow?"

He looked up quickly at her. "Do you care?" he asked, eagerly.

She had begun to reply, and he was hanging upon her words, when the native servant made his appearance. Jim clapped his hand to his head in a frenzy of exasperation. "Confound you!—what do you want?" he shouted to the man.

"I suppose he's come to tell us it's high time to be going," said Monimé, laughing in his face.

Jim picked up a stone and hurled it viciously over the wall into the void beyond. He would willingly have leapt upon the inoffensive servant and throttled him where he stood.

Chapter XVI: THE RETURN

THUS it came about that Jim took ship back to Trieste, leaving Monimé and Ian to go the following week to Alexandria, whence the boy and his nurse would journey by a P. and O. liner direct to England.

It was a blustering evening in early November when he arrived in London, and to his sad heart the streets through which he passed and the small hotel where he was to stay were dreary in the extreme. His brain was full of the sunshine of the Mediterranean; and the burning passion of his love for Monimé seemed to draw all his vitality inwards, and to leave frozen and desolate that part of his entity which had to encounter the immediate world of actuality.

Upon the following morning it rained, and for some time he lay in bed, staring out through the wet window-pane at the grey sky and the grimy chimney pots, dreading to arise and meet his fate. His first object was to find Mrs. Darling. She had always been understanding and sympathetic, and now she would perhaps aid him in his predicament. The news that he was still alive would then have to be broken gently to Dolly, and the situation would have to be handled in such a way that she would find it to her advantage to divorce him. His heart sank as the thought occurred to him that very possibly

she would welcome his return and refuse to part from him. In that case the game would be lost and life would be intolerable.

At the outset, however, his plans met with a check. An early visit to the flat where Mrs. Darling lived revealed the fact that she had rented it furnished, and the only address known to the present tenant was that of Eversfield. This did not necessarily mean that she was staying with her daughter, and Jim was left on the doorstep wondering what was the best way of getting hold of her quickly.

A sudden resolve caused him to hail a taxi and to drive to Paddington Station. He would catch the first train to Oxford, pay a surreptitious visit to Eversfield, and try to get into touch with Smiley-face, his one friend there. The poacher would give him all the news, and would doubtless be of assistance to him in various ways; and his reliability in regard to keeping the secret was unquestionable. Smiley was a master of the art of secrecy.

Jim was wearing a high-collared raincoat and a slouch hat, and, with the one turned up and the other pulled down, he would easily avoid recognition, even if, in the by-ways he proposed to follow, he were to meet with anybody of his acquaintance. And after all, since he would be obliged, in any event, to come back from the dead for the purpose of his divorce, an indefinite rumour that he had been seen might be the gentlest manner of breaking the news to Dolly. He wanted to spare her a sudden shock.

He had not long to wait for a train, and by noon he was setting out across the muddy fields behind

the houses of Oxford, munching some railway sandwiches as he went. The rain had cleared off, but the sky was still grey; and the mild, misty atmosphere of the Thames Valley filled his heart with gloom and brought recollections of the days of his captivity crowding back into his mind. He could hardly believe that he had been absent not much more than six months. He had lived through an eternity in that brief space.

Nobody was encountered on the way, and when he mounted the last stile, and stepped into the familiar pathway behind the church at Eversfield he was still a solitary figure, moving like a ghost through the damp mist.

It was his intention now to skirt the village, and to walk on to the isolated cottage where Smiley-face lived with old Jenny; but the silence of his surroundings, and the death-like stillness of the little church, induced him to creep across the graveyard and to slip through the door into the building.

In the aisle he stood for a while lost in thought; while the old clock in the gallery ticked out the seconds. He felt as though he were a spirit come back from the dead; and, indeed, the sight of the familiar pews, the escutcheons, and the memorial tablets of his ancestors, produced in him a sensation such as a midnight ghost might feel when called out of death's celestial dream to walk again amidst the scenes of his misdeeds.

Suddenly a new and shining brass tablet at the side of the chancel caught his eye; and he hastened forward, his heart beating with a kind of dread of

that which he would see written thereon for all to read. The inscription was truly staggering:—

IN GRATEFUL AND UNDYING MEMORY OF JAMES CHAMPERNOWNE TUNDERING-WEST, ESQUIRE, OF EVERSFIELD MANOR, WHO, AFTER AN UNASSUMING BUT EXEMPLARY LIFE, MARKED BY TRUE CHRISTIAN PIETY AND AN UNSWERVING DEVOTION TO DUTY, MET AN UNTIMELY DEATH, IN THE FLOWER OF HIS MANHOOD, AT THE HAND OF AN ASSASSIN, NEAR PISA, ITALY, THIS STONE HAS BEEN SET UP BY HIS SORROWING WIDOW, DOROTHY TUNDERING-WEST.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.—Rev. ii. 10.

“Good Lord!” Jim muttered, his sallow face for a moment red with shame. “And in face of this, I have got to come back to life, so that this ‘sorrowing widow’ may divorce me, and thereby empower me to give the name of Tundering-West to my son and leave him in my will the property I abandoned! A pretty muddle!”

He turned away, sick at heart. “O England, England!” he whispered. “Dear nation of hypocrites!—at all costs keeping up the pretence so that the traditional example may be set for coming generations. . . . Presently they will remove this tablet, and instead they will scrawl across their memories the words: ‘He failed in his duty, because he hid not his dirty linen.’ ”

He almost ran from the church.

During the continuation of his walk he came upon two of the villagers, but in each case he was able to turn to the hedge as though searching for the last remaining blackberries, and so avoided a face-to-face encounter. His road led him past the

back of the woods of the Manor, those woods whither he had so often fled for comfort; and it occurred to him that before walking the further two miles to Jenny's cottage he might whistle the call which used to bring the poacher to him in the old days. It was just the sort of misty afternoon on which Smiley was wont to slip in amongst the trees.

He therefore stepped into a gap in the encircling hedge of bramble and thorn, the straight muddy road passing into the haze behind him, and the brown, misty woods, carpeted with wet leaves, before him; and, curving his hand around his mouth, he uttered that long low whistle which sounded like the wail of a lost soul, and which more than once had struck terror into the heart of some passing yokel.

Thrice he repeated it, pausing between to listen for the answering call and the familiar cracking of the twigs; and he was about to make a final attempt when of a sudden he heard a slight sound upon the road some fifty yards away. Turning quickly, he saw the ragged, well-remembered figure dart out from the hedge into the middle of the road, eagerly running to right and left like a dog that has lost the scent. He was hatless, and his mop of dirty red hair was unmistakable.

Jim stepped out into the roadway, and thereat Smiley-face came bounding towards him, his arms stretched wide, his smile extending from ear to ear, and his little blue eyes agleam.

"Hullo, Smiley, old sport!" said Jim, holding out his hand; but he was wholly unprepared for the scene which followed.

Smiley's knees seemed to give way under him, and, snatching at Jim's hand, he stumbled and fell forward upon the grass at the roadside, panting, coughing, and laughing. "O God! O God! O God!" he gasped. "I knew you was alive, sir: I knew it in me bones."

He pulled himself up on to his knees, and held Jim's hand to his face, hugging it in a sort of frenzy of animal delight.

"Get up!" said Jim, sharply. "What's the matter with you?"

"I dunno," Smiley answered, sheepishly, clambering to his feet. "I felt sort o' dizzy-dazzy like. I get took like that sometimes. I 'ad the doctor to me once: he told old Jenny it was my ticket home. That's what 'e said it was: I heerd 'im say it to 'er."

"Been ill, have you?" Jim asked, putting his hand on the poacher's shoulder, and observing now how haggard the face had grown.

"I'll be fit as a fiddle now you've come back," he answered, laughing. "I knew you wasn't dead! Murdered, they said you was; but I says to old Jenny: 'I'll not believe it,' I says; 'not with 'im able to floor I with one twist of his 'and. 'E's just gone off tramping,' I says. 'E's gone back to the roads. . . . 'E never could abide a bedroom.'"

"Well, you were right, Smiley," Jim replied. "I couldn't stick it any longer, and so I quitted. But I mustn't be seen, you understand. I'm dead. I've only come down here to get into touch with you, and find out how things are going on."

"Friends stick to friends," the poacher crooned, intoning the words like a chant. "I never 'ad no

friend except you. It seems like I given you everything I got inside my 'ead."

They entered the wood together, and sat down side by side upon a fallen tree trunk. Jim questioned him about Dolly, and was told that she was living quietly at the Manor, a little widow in a pretty black dress; and that her mother sometimes came to stay with her, but was not at present in Eversfield, so far as he knew.

"Do you think she misses me?" Jim asked.

Smiley wagged his head. "I wouldn't like to say for sure," he answered; "but betwixt you and me, sir, that there Mr. Merrivall do spend a deal o' time at the Manor. Jane Potts, his 'ousekeeper, be terrible mad about it. They do say her watches him like a ferret. It's jealousy, seeing her's been as good as a wife to 'im, these many years. But he's that took with your lady, sir, he can't see what's brewing. Seems like as they'd make a match of it when her mourning's up."

"The devil they would!" Jim exclaimed, his face lighting up. "Why, then, she'll be very willing to divorce me. . . . That's good news, Smiley!"

The poacher looked perplexed. "Divorce you?" he asked. "Baint you staying dead, then?"

Jim put his hand on Smiley's shoulder again. "Look here," he said, "I told you once that if ever I confided my troubles to anybody it would be to you. Can I trust you to hold your tongue?"

Smiley exposed all his yellow teeth in a wide grin. "You can trust I through thick and thin, same as what you said once. They could tear my

liver out, but they'd not make I tell what you said I mustn't tell; and that's gospel."

Thereupon Jim explained the whole situation to him, telling him how in a far country he had found again the woman he ought to have married, and how he hoped that Dolly would free him.

"It's life or death, Smiley," he said earnestly. "If my wife welcomes me back from the grave, and claims her rights, I shall put a bullet through my head, for I could not be the husband of a sham thing now that I know what it is to love a real woman. Oh, man, I'm devoured by love. I'm burning to be back with her, and with the son she has borne me. Don't you see I'm in hell, and the fires of hell are consuming me?"

The poacher scratched his tousled red hair. "Yes, I see," he said. "And I reckon her's waiting for you over there in them furrin lands where the sun's shining and the birds are singing. When they told I you was dead I says to old Jenny you'd only gone to those countries you used to talk about, where the trees are green the year round, and you look down into the water and see the trout a-sliding over mother-o'-pearl. ' 'E's heard the temple-bells a-calling,' I says, 'the same as 'e sang about that day in the parish-room,' I says, 'and 'e's just sitting lazy by the river, and maybe the queen of them parts is a-kissing of 'is 'and.' "

Jim laughed aloud. "Smiley, you're a poet," he said, "but you came pretty near the truth, only it was I who was kissing *her* hand."

For a while longer they talked, but at length Jim proposed that the poacher should go at once to Ted

Barnes, the postman, and find out whether Mrs. Darling was at the Manor or not, and if not, perhaps Ted could be induced to tell him the address to which her letters were forwarded. "Say you want to send her a couple of rabbits," Jim suggested, with a laugh. He looked at his watch. "It will be dusk in two hours or so. Meet me here at about that time, just before it is dark."

Smiley seemed eager to be of service, and, repeatedly touching his forelock, went off on his mission in high spirits, turning round to wave a dirty hand to his adored friend as he glided away amongst the tree trunks into the haze. Thereupon Jim set off for a walk in the direction of the neighbouring village of Bedley-Sutton, in order to pass the time; and it was an hour later that he returned to the woods of the Manor.

There was still another hour to wait before he might expect Smiley's return; and he therefore strolled through the silent woods, visiting with gloomy curiosity the various well-remembered scenes of his days of captivity. "How could I ever have stood it?" he questioned himself; yet at the back of his mind there was the overwhelming consciousness that here was the home of his forefathers, the home he wished to hand on to his son, but that now it belonged to Dolly, a woman to whom he felt no sense of relationship, and ultimately it would pass out of his family, unless he laid claim to it anew.

The turmoil in his mind was extreme, and his dilemma was made more desperate by the thought that Monimé, whose instinctive wisdom and practical sympathy might now be so helpful, must be

shut out from these events and kept in ignorance of his perplexity. He yearned to write to her and make a clean breast of it, yet he feared the blighting effect of such a confession of crude error and deception. With his whole heart he detested himself.

His wandering footsteps led him at length to a point not far distant from the bottom of the Manor garden. He had been threading his way unconsciously through undergrowth and brambles, carrying his coat over his arm and his hat in his hand; and he was about to step out on to the mossy pathway which led to the garden gate when suddenly he heard voices at no great distance, and with beating heart, he stepped back into a thicket and crouched there behind the tall-growing bracken.

A moment later he was staring with flushed face at the approaching figures of Dolly and George Merrivall, who were strolling towards him, she gazing up at her middle-aged companion, and he, his arm about her, looking down at her with his large fish-like eyes. The picture stamped itself savagely upon his mind.

Dolly was wearing a smart black coat and skirt, and a black-and-white scarf was flung around her neck. A saucy little black felt hat, adorned with a stiff feather, showed up her golden hair and the fair complexion of her childlike face. Merrivall, in a new walking-suit of grey homespun, a large cap to match, and grey stockings covering his thin legs, seemed to be clothed to approximate to the grey haze of the afternoon; and even his face appeared grey, like the dead ashes of a fire long burnt out.

Soon they were close at hand, and Jim could hear their words.

"O George," Dolly was saying, "how frightening the woods are in the half-light! I believe they really are haunted. Why did you dare me to come here?"

"It was you who proposed it," he answered, shortly.

"Did I?" she replied, looking up at him with innocent eyes. "Well, I'm not really afraid when you are with me. You're so strong, so protective. I suppose there's nothing in the world that could frighten you."

"Not many things," he agreed, with a brave toss of his head.

She pressed his arm. "You know, that's what I always missed so much in poor Jim. I could never look to him for protection; I could never lean on him. And, you see, I'm such a little coward, really: you should see me running sometimes from some silly thing that has startled me."

"My little fawn!" he murmured, lifting her hand to his lips.

Jim's eyes were wild. "The same old game!" he muttered to himself, as he peered at them between the wet, brown leaves of the bracken.

"You need a man to take care of you," Merrivall continued. "How long must we wait before we can announce our engagement?"

"You are impatient, George," she replied. "Even though I never really loved Jim, I feel I ought to give his memory the tribute of the usual year. People who don't know how he forced me to marry him and how brutally he ill-treated me, would say unkind things if I married you any sooner than that."

Merrivall remained silent for a moment, standing still upon the mossy pathway. "Nobody would know if we got married at once at a registry office," he said at length. "We could go abroad for some months."

She looked up at him archly. "A wife is a very expensive thing you know," she smiled. "Why, a woman's clothes alone cost a fortune. You see it isn't only what shows on the outside—it's all the wonderful things underneath. . . ."

They passed on out of earshot, leaving Jim, who remembered so well her tricks, consumed by fierce anger, and overwhelmed by his destiny. If Dolly married this man, the final complication would be reached, and the legal difficulties would be multiplied out of all reckoning. Moreover, the thought that the home of the Tundering-Wests should pass to a washed-out drunken remittance man enhanced the value of the estate a hundredfold in his eyes. He felt inclined to reveal himself at once: he was mad with rage at her misrepresentation of the facts of their relationship.

A few moments later Merrivall stopped short, looking at his watch; and, as he turned, Jim could hear again his words. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "I shall be late for the whist drive. What am I thinking of!"

He took Dolly's hand and ran back at a jog-trot towards the gate. As soon as they had passed him and were hidden by the bend in the path, Jim rose to his feet and hurried after them. He had no settled purpose: he wished only to follow them. When he came within fifty yards of the border of the woods, however, he paused behind a tree, and

watched Merrivall as he hastened across the garden, leaving Dolly panting at the gate. She was perhaps a little annoyed at his precipitation, and thought it more dignified to let him be, now that she was back in the safety of her garden and the fearsome woods were behind her.

After a lapse of a minute or two Jim observed that she was looking from side to side as though she had lost something, and soon he could see that she had dropped one of her gloves, and was trying to pluck up her courage to enter the gloomy dimness of the haunted woods once more in order to find it. His eye searched the pathway, and presently he discerned the missing glove lying not more than a few yards from him, a little further into the woods.

He had no time to conceal himself before Dolly came running down the pathway, looking furtively to right and left. She passed without seeing him and retrieved the glove; but as she turned to retrace her steps she caught sight of him and started back, uttering a cry of fright.

Flight seemed useless to Jim: the crisis had come, and in his bitter wrath he gladly faced it. Slowly and deliberately he stepped forward on to the pathway and stood there barring her way. His raincoat and hat were still amongst the bracken at his former place of hiding, and now he stood silently in the grey and ghostly haze, wearing an old suit of clothes which she knew well, his dark hair falling untidily about his forehead, his face ashen white, his eyes burning with anger, his whole attitude menacing and vindictive.

Dolly's terror was horrible to behold. Her right

hand and arm beat at the air conclusively; the knuckles of her left hand were thrust between her chattering teeth; her eyes were dilated, and her eyebrows seemed to have gone up into her hair.

"I didn't mean it, Jim!" she gasped. "I didn't mean it! Go away! I'll tell him the truth; I'll tell him you were good to me . . . O God, take him away! . . . Go back to your grave, Jim. O God, take him away, take him away . . . I!"

Her voice rose to a shriek; and, falling upon her knees, she beat the soft moss of the pathway with her fists in frenzy.

"Get up, you little fool!" Jim snapped. "I'm not a ghost. I'm alive: look at me."

She stared at him with her mouth open, crawled forward, and rose to her feet. Suddenly, as the truth seemed to dawn upon her, the colour surged into her cheeks, and there came an expression of hatred into her face which Jim had not seen before, and which wholly surpassed the animosity he himself felt.

"You're *alive*?" she gasped. "You weren't murdered? You've just played a trick on me?"

"Yes," he answered. "I didn't mean to turn up again, only circumstances have compelled me to."

"You can't come back!" she cried, wringing her hands in such desperation that a certain degree of pity was added to Jim's tumult of emotions. "You're dead: you can't come back to life again, you can't, you can't! . . . Spoiling everything like this, you beast!—you devil! Oh, I might have guessed it was all a dirty trick to spite me. You've been living with some other woman, I suppose. Well, go back to her. I've done with you. Nobody wants you

here: we all thanked Heaven when you died. You were always impossible."

She moved to and fro, now twisting her gloves in her hands, now pointing at him with shaking fingers, and now clutching at her breast and throat.

"Well, there it is," Jim said, feeling himself to be in the wrong. "I'm sorry about it all, but here I am, alive. I'm not going to bother you. All I want is for you to divorce me for desertion, so that I can be quit of you and Eversfield for the rest of my life."

"Divorce you?" she repeated, furiously. "Divorce a dead man? Make myself a laughing stock? Why, I've only just paid for a memorial tablet for you in the church; a lying tablet, too, in which I've called myself your 'sorrowing widow.' It isn't true. I felt no sorrow: I think I always detested you. I should never have married you if it hadn't been for mother saying you were such a good match. And now, just when I've found a real man, a man who will look after me, you come sneaking home again, prowling about like a tramp, or a burglar, or something. I wish to God you *were* dead!"

Under her lashing tongue, Jim was nonplussed. He wanted to tell her how she had made his life impossible by her shams and pretences, her crude view of marriage, her intrinsic uselessness; but words were not forthcoming. "As far as you are concerned," he said lamely, "I shall be dead as soon as you divorce me. It will mean postponing your marriage for a few months: that's all."

"What have you come back for?" she cried, at length. "Is it money you want? I suppose it's a sort of blackmail."

"No, I don't want money," he said. "I'll leave you the bulk of the estate. But I may as well tell you right away, you will only have a life-interest in this place. On your death it will revert to me and my successors. Those are my terms; and if you don't agree to them, I'll claim the whole estate again and make you only an allowance."

"Oh, you fiend!" she cried, beside herself once more with fury. "The utter cruelty and callousness of it! It's just a practical joke you've played on me, coming back like a cad when we all thought you were dead and done with. I'll tell everybody: I'll make your name stink in the nostrils of every man who is a gentleman."

Jim shrugged his shoulders; and, suddenly, to his amazement she leapt at him and dug her nails into his face. He grabbed hold of her arms, and for a dreadful moment they struggled like two savages. Then she broke loose from him and dashed away amongst the misty trees at the side of the pathway, stumbling through the bracken, and crying out to him disjointed words of fury. For some moments Jim stood staring after her, listening to the crackling of the twigs which marked her progress. She was working round, it seemed, towards the gate of the manor, and presently the sounds ceased, as though she had paused to get her breath.

Thereat Jim walked back towards his rendezvous, recovering his coat and hat on the way. His brain was confused and distracted, and a feeling of nausea was upon him. Passionately he hated himself; and miserably he asked himself what Monimé would think of the whole unsavoury business were she ever to hear of it.

Chapter XVII: THE CATASTROPHE

DARKNESS was falling, and Jim, whose heart was in his boots, was beginning to feel cold in spite of the mildness of the day, when Smiley-face made his appearance, touching his forelock ingratiatingly.

"I been a long time, sir," he explained, "but you know what that there Ted Barnes is. Slow to talk and wanting a power of persuading. But I got the address from 'im: 'ere it is, wrote on this paper."

He handed Jim a slip of paper, upon which the address of a Kensington hotel was written. He was grinning triumphantly, as though he had performed some great service for his friend.

"Good lad," said Jim. "That's very smart of you. I say, Smiley: I've had the deuce of a time while you were in the village. I met my wife!"

The poacher smiled from ear to ear. "O Lordee!" he chuckled. "I reckon that 'ud give her a bit of a turn, like."

Jim told him something of what had occurred, but Smiley's attitude of frank amusement caused him to cut the story short; and it was not long before he brought the interview to an end.

As they shook hands at the edge of the wood, Smiley suddenly paused and raised his finger. "Did you hear anything?" he asked.

"No," said Jim, after listening for a few moments.

"Thought I heard a step," the poacher went on. "There's a heap o' tramps about these days. I seen 'em in the woods sometimes, but I don't allow no one to poach there except me. . . ."

He was in a loquacious mood, and Jim found it necessary to make a resolute interruption of the flow of his words by shaking him warmly by the hand once more and setting off down the dark lane in the direction of Oxford.

He reached London, somewhat dazed, in time for dinner, and by nine o'clock he was driving out to Kensington to pay a visit to Mrs. Darling. Now that Dolly knew that he was alive, it would be as well for him to enlist the services of her mother as soon as possible. He could, perhaps, make it worth her while to aid him in regard to the divorce.

Upon arriving at the small private hotel where she was staying he was shown into an unoccupied sitting-room.

"What name, sir?" asked the page.

"Mr. Tundering-West," said Jim, apprehensive of the jolt the announcement would cause, but feeling that since a shock could not be avoided, it would be better for her to receive it before she entered the room.

He had not long to wait: after a few minutes of uncomfortable fiddling with his hat, Mrs. Darling suddenly bounced in, as though she had been kicked from behind. Then, with astonished eyes fixed on Jim, she shut the door and stood staring at him in complete silence.

"Yes," he said, nervously smiling, "it's me, Mrs. Darling!"

"Good gracious!" she gasped. "Jim! You—you—you lunatic! What on earth are you doing in the land of the living? You're supposed to be dead and buried."

"No, not buried," he corrected her. "I was knifed, you remember, and dropped into the sea."

She passed her hand across her forehead. "You mean you swam back home?" Her voice was awed.

"Something like that," he laughed. "Anyway, here I am; and I've come to you to ask what I'm to do next. I've just had a talk with Dolly."

Mrs. Darling threw up her hands, and therewith she set about his cross-examination, asking him a number of questions in regard to his life, and receiving a number of evasive replies. "My good man," she said at length, "do you realize that Dolly is an established widow, on the look out, in fact, for another husband? Do you realize that we've had a solemn memorial service for you, and put a tablet up in the church?"

"Yes, I've seen it," he answered. "It made me blush for shame."

"I'm very glad to hear it," she said. "You may well be ashamed that you have fallen so far short of the virtues attributed to you. I always think it is such a wonderful thing in nature that the only creatures who can blush are the only creatures who have occasion to."

Considering that it was her daughter's future which was at stake, Mrs. Darling seemed to Jim to be treating matters very lightly.

"Do you realize," she went on, her voice rising, "that your will has been read, and Dolly owns every

penny you had, and gives me three hundred pounds a year allowance?"

"Only three hundred?" he remarked. "That's mean. I'll give you four."

"It's not yours to give," she answered. "You're dead—dead as mutton. You can't play fast and loose with death like that, you know. When you're murdered, you're murdered, and there's an end of it. It would make things absolutely impossible if people could go popping in and out of their graves like you are doing. Surely you can see that. What did Dolly say?"

"Oh, she was very upset," he told her. "She stormed at me and called me every name under the sun; said she had always hated me; told me she was going to marry George Merrivall."

"Well, what else did you expect? She says you ill-treated her horribly."

"That's a lie," said Jim, sharply.

"Yes, so I told her," Mrs. Darling replied. "I know you. You're perfectly mad, but I always felt you were very decent to Dolly, considering what a little fraud she is."

"Anyhow, I don't mind her saying I ill-treated her," he added, "if that's any use for the purpose of our divorce."

"Divorce?" cried Mrs. Darling. "Do you want her to divorce you. What for?"

"So that I can be quit of her, and marry again if I find the right woman."

Mrs. Darling held up her hands. "What sublime courage! But you musn't let marriage become a habit, for the divorce courts are very slow, you know.

I have a woman friend who is already three marriages ahead of her divorces. I should have thought that a man like you, who is something of a philosopher and thinker, would now shun marriage like the plague. But I suppose even the cleverest men . . . There is the famous case of Socrates, who died of an overdose of wedlock."

"Hemlock," he corrected her.

"Ah, yes, to be sure. Perhaps it is simply your youth: you still look very young, in spite of your recent death. I remember, in the days before my bright future had resolved itself into a shady past, I, too, was an optimist about marriage. But I was soon cured. So long as he liked me, my husband was so terribly jealous of me. It was quite intolerable. He would not even let my eyes wander from him. Why, I remember once turning my head away from him for a moment because I had hiccups, and being instantly cured by his seizing my throat in a consequent fit of passion. . . . Were you ever jealous of Dolly?"

"No," said Jim; "and this afternoon I saw her making love to George Merrivall without any feeling except annoyance with myself for ever having believed in her."

"Poor Dolly," sighed her mother. "I am devoted to her, as you know; but I do realize her faults, and I know what you had to put up with."

For some time they discussed the possibilities of divorce, and Mrs. Darling was frankly business-like in regard to the financial side of the affair.

"Of course," she said, "it is very hard to do business with you, my dear Jim, because you are an

honest man. I prefer dealing with crooks. It is so simple, because you always know that at some stage of the game they are going to try to trip you up. But with honest men, you never know what they'll do next."

The upshot of their conversation was an understanding that Mrs. Darling should go down next day to Eversfield and win her daughter over to the idea of divorce; and, this being arranged, he rose to go.

"Good-bye," he said, warmly shaking her hand. "I can't begin to thank you for your kindness, and generosity of mind."

"Oh, nonsense!" she laughed. "I'm just a scheming old woman, Jim. As I've often told you, I'd sell my soul for an income; and in this case it is obvious that, since you are alive, you hold the family purse-strings. That's why I am nice to you."

"I don't believe it," he answered.

"Well, anyway," she said, "I wish you well, dead or alive. Good-bye, my dear. May you be with the rich in this world and with the poor in the world to come."

Jim arrived back at his hotel in a somewhat happier frame of mind, and went at once to his bedroom, tired after the adventures of the day. When he was in bed, however, he found that sleep had deserted him; and for some time he lay on his back, vainly endeavouring to quell the turbulence of the mob of his thoughts. The figure of Dolly kept presenting itself to his mind, and his inward ears heard her voice continuously railing at him and reproaching him.

Her pretty, silly little face seemed to push in upon his thoughts of Monimé; and suddenly he sat up, scared by the vividness of the impression, and wondering whether it were some sort of portent of coming calamity in regard to the new life for which he hoped so passionately. He switched on the light, and, kicking off the bedclothes, went across to the washstand and poured himself out a dose of whisky from his flask. The radiator was too hot, and the room felt stuffy; but, throwing open the window, a blast of cold air and wet sleet searched him to the skin, and obliged him to shut it again.

"Oh, what a God-forsaken country!" he muttered; and therewith fetched his guitar from its case, and sitting cross-legged upon the bed in his pyjamas, began twanging the strings and singing old songs in a minor key which sounded like dirges for the dead. The music soothed him, and soon he was pouring his whole heart into the melodies, oblivious to all around him. They were songs of love now, and as he sang his thoughts went out over the seas to Cairo where Monimé at this moment was probably lying asleep in her bed, her black hair spread upon the pillow.

There was a sharp knock upon the door. "Come in," he called out, pausing in his song, but remaining seated upon the bed, with his fingers upon the strings of his guitar.

A red-faced, grey-moustached man of military appearance stumped into the room, clad in a brown dressing-gown. "Confound you, sir!" he roared. "If you don't put that damned banjo away and go to bed, I'll ring for the manager."

"What's it to do with you?" Jim asked, twanging the strings dreamily.

"It's disturbing the whole hotel," he answered. "Nobody can get a wink of sleep with that blasted noise going on. Damn it, sir!—have you no sense of duty to your neighbour?"

The question hit home: once again he had been proved wanting in consideration. "I'm most awfully sorry," he said, with genuine contrition. "I'd clean forgotten I was in a hotel. Please forgive me. Have a whisky and soda? Have a cigar?"

His visitor did not deign to reply. He stared at Jim with hot, scowling eyes, and then, making a contemptuous gesture, left the room again, slamming the door after him.

"Well, that's that," Jim muttered, thereafter returning to bed, annoyed with himself and distressed that he should have caused annoyance to others. "What a swine I am," he thought.

Matthew Arnold's lines:—

Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be. . . .

came into his brain, and gloomily he repeated them half aloud. Would Monimé marry him? Or would she, too, find him impossible? What a mess he had made of his life! Perhaps Dolly had been justified in her dislike of him.

With such thoughts as these he at last fell off to sleep.

Next morning, after breakfast, he picked up a newspaper in the smoking-room, and for some minutes read the foreign news without much interest.

Then suddenly a set of headlines caught his attention, and caused him to sit up, aghast, in his chair. The printed words swayed before his eyes as he read the appalling news.

"Last night," the story began, "the body of Mrs. Dorothy Tundering-West, widow of the late James Tundering-West, of the Manor, Eversfield, near Oxford, was found in a wood adjoining the grounds of the Manor. The back of the skull was smashed in, probably by a blow from a large stone which was found near by with bloodstains upon it. Mrs. West had been missing since four o'clock in the afternoon, and medical evidence indicates that death must have occurred at about that hour. . . ."

With desperate haste his eyes travelled down the column. There was no doubt that she had been murdered, said the report, but the thick carpeting of damp leaves upon the ground had retained no impression of the offender's footprints. She was lying on her face, and a second wound upon her forehead was probably caused by her fall. The motive was not apparent, for there had been no robbery, and there were no signs of a struggle.

The police, he read, attached some significance to the presence of a man of foreign appearance who was seen in the early afternoon picking berries from a hedge in the neighbourhood. In this connection it was recalled that Mr. Tundering-West had died by the hand of an assassin in Italy only a few months ago, and it was possible that the two crimes were both the outcome of some secret vendetta. What had induced the unfortunate lady to go into

the woods was a mystery, and perhaps indicated that she had been lured to her doom.

Jim's first emotions were those of extreme horror at the crime, and pity for Dolly. The manner of her death appalled him; and though he was not conscious of any binding relationship to her, the catastrophe of her murder swept across his being like a fierce wind, as it were, uprooting the plantations of his overstocked brain, or like a breaking wave thundering on to the shingle of his multitudinous thoughts.

It was fortunate that he was alone in the smoking-room, for his agitation was such that his exclamations were uttered audibly, and soon he was pacing the floor, the newspaper crumpled in his hand. It seemed to be his fate that the crises of his life should be announced to him through the columns of the daily Press. In this manner he had read of his inheritance, of his supposed murder at Pisa, and now of the death of his wife. It was as though roguish powers had selected him as a victim on whom thus to spring surprises.

Who could have committed the crime? The thought of Smiley-face came immediately to his mind, but was as quickly dismissed again. The poacher, he knew, had been busy in the village getting Mrs. Darling's address from the postman; and, moreover, his behaviour when they had met again clearly proclaimed his innocence. Possibly some tramp had been lurking in the woods, as Smiley had suspected, and Dolly had been assaulted by him as she ran from Jim. He remembered now with awe the sudden silence which had followed

her loud flight through the crackling undergrowth.

The wretched Merrivall, he realized, would have to keep his movements well hidden; for if it were known that he had been in the woods with Dolly he would most assuredly be suspected, motive or no motive. If anybody had seen him running across the manor garden on his way to the forgotten whist-drive it would go hard with him.

Suddenly, following this thought, came the awful realization of his own peril. He, Jim, was the last man to see her alive; and in his own case a motive would not be lacking. Smiley-face would be certain to suspect him, and by some mistake might give the secret away.

And then—Mrs. Darling! She knew he had seen Dolly in the woods, she knew they had quarrelled violently! Of course, she would accuse him! The thought blared at him like a discordant trumpet, proclaiming his guilt to the world, while his heart drummed a wild accompaniment.

In bewilderment he ran blindly up the stairs to his bedroom and locked the door behind him.

Chapter XVIII: DESTINY

FOR some time he sat in his bedroom, overwhelmed by horror and pity at Dolly's death, and by the terrible menace of his own situation. Mrs. Darling would certainly denounce him to the police, for hardly could she think otherwise than that he was the murderer of her daughter, even though his open visit to her at her hotel would be difficult to reconcile with his guilt.

Fate seemed to be playing with him, torturing him, hitting him from all sides. If only he had postponed his visit to Mrs. Darling he would now be free to slip away as unnoticed as he had come, resuming his life in the Near East as Jim Easton, and being in no way suspected of the crime, for the silence of Smiley-face could be relied on.

But now he was done for! True, he was to-day a widower, and was therefore in a position to marry the woman whom he loved with a passion which seemed only to grow stronger as the complications increased. But he would be obliged to lie to her daily, throughout his life: there would always be this pitiable barrier of deception between them. And, moreover, the tragedy of Dolly's death so filled his mind that any advantage it might have to himself was hardly able to be realized. He was profoundly shocked at her pitiable end, and its consequences were enveloped in gloom.

Even though Mrs. Darling were to hold her tongue, the Eversfield estate would none the less be wholly lost to him now, nor would his son ever reign there as a Tundering-West; for were he to lay claim to the property, or reveal the fact that he, James Tundering-West, was alive, Monimé would think he had gone to England and had done Dolly to death so as to be free to marry again. How could she think otherwise?

And, again, though he were for the time being to escape from the arm of the law, he could only marry Monimé at the risk of dragging her into a possible scandal in the future.

He paced his bedroom in his despair, now cursing himself for his actions, now screwing up his eyes to shut out the pitiful picture of Dolly, now laughing aloud, like a madman, at the nightmare of his own position. One thing was certain: he must leave England this very morning and make his way back to Cyprus or Egypt, or somewhere. Already Mrs. Darling might have notified the police. Fortunately she did not know his address, nor had she ever heard the name "Easton," but doubtless the ports would be watched, and were he to delay his departure he would be caught.

In sudden haste which bordered on frenzy he packed his portmanteau and rang for his bill; and soon he was driving to the station, a huddled figure with hat pulled down over his eyes. He was far too early for the train, and, during the long wait every pair of eyes which looked into his set his heart beating with apprehension.

He had always been an outlaw: he had never fully

understood the basis of society, nor were the habits of the community altogether intelligible to him. He had gone his own ways, and had left organized humanity to go theirs. They had not molested one another. But now the State had a grievance against him, and soon it would be feeling out for him with its millions of antennæ, searching over hill and dale, city and field, with waving, creeping tentacles. He would have to duck and dodge continuously to avoid being caught, and always there would be in his heart the terror of that cruel, relentless mouth waiting to suck the life out of him.

His relief was intense when at the end of the day he found himself, still unmolested, in Paris. But he did not here stay his flight. All through the night he journeyed southwards, sitting with lolling head in the corner of a third-class compartment in a slow train—a mode of travelling which he had deemed the least conspicuous.

At length, upon the following evening, he reached Marseilles, where he put up at a small hotel at which he had stayed more than once under the name of Easton. He told the proprietor he had just come from Italy, a remark which led him to a frenzied erasing of labels from his baggage in his bedroom.

The next morning he made inquiries as to the steamers sailing east, and was relieved to find that a French liner was leaving for Alexandria in a few hours. He obtained a berth without difficulty and, after a period of horrible anxiety at the docks, found himself once more upon the high seas, the menace of the western world fading into the distance behind him, and the greater chances of the Orient ahead.

Thus he arrived back one morning upon the soil of Egypt, a fugitive from the terror of the law, all his nerves strained to breaking-point, his face pallid, his dark eyes wild. With aching heart he yearned for the serenity which Monimé exuded like the perfume of incense around her; he longed to be able to go to her and to bare his soul of its secrets, and to lay his heavy head upon her complacent breast; he craved for the comfort of those caressing hands which seemed in their soothing touch to be endowed with the mother-craft of all the ages.

Never before in his independent life had he felt so profound a desire for sympathy and companionship, yet now more than ever must he lock up his troubles in his own heart. He would write to her at Mena House Hotel, near Cairo, where she was staying, and tell her . . . tell her what? That he could not live without her, that he had come back to her after but a couple of days in England, that she held for him the keys of heaven, that away from her he was in outer darkness. He would await her answer here in Alexandria, and by the time it arrived perhaps he would have recovered in some degree his equilibrium.

Feeling that his safety lay in the unbroken continuity of his life as Jim Easton, he went to the little Hotel des Beaux-Esprits, vaguely telling the proprietress that he had travelled over from Cyprus. Some London papers had just arrived and these, having come by a faster route, carried the news to the second morning after his departure from England. His hand shook as he searched the columns for the "Eversfield Murder," and his excitement and relief

were altogether beyond description when he read that George Merrivall's housekeeper, Jane Potts, had been arrested and charged with the crime.

Eagerly he turned to the recent copies of the local newspaper in which the English telegrams were published daily, and here he read that the evidence against the woman was of such damning character that she had been committed for trial. He recalled how Smiley-face had spoken of this woman's jealousy of Dolly, and it seemed evident that she had followed George Merrivall into the woods that day and had wreaked her vengeance on her rival.

Mrs. Darling, then, had not notified the police! Doubtless she had heard of the guilt of Jane Potts in time to prevent the further scandal in regard to himself. She must have realized at once that since he was not the murderer there was no good purpose to be served in revealing the fact that he was still alive. Possibly, indeed, she may have hoped to profit by Dolly's death—she was the next-of-kin—and had no wish to resuscitate the rightful lord of the manor from his supposed grave beneath the waves of Pisa. He could quite imagine the pleasant, unscrupulous soul saying to him: "You remain dead, my lad, and make no claim to the estate, or I'll force you also to stand your trial for the murder, whether you did it or not."

He was free, then! He wanted to shout the tidings to the four corners of the world. He was free to go to Monimé, and to ask her to marry him. For a short time longer he would have to hide his identity: he must wait until Jane Potts had paid the penalty of her jealousy. Then he could pension off

Mrs. Darling, and, when all was settled and the estate once more in his possession, the opportune moment would have arrived for his clean breast to Monimé. She would understand; she would forgive! With him she would rejoice that by bequest their son would be made heir to a comfortable income and home, while they themselves would have the means to procure that house of their dreams, somewhere beside the blue Mediterranean, which should be their resting-place at desired intervals in their untrammelled wanderings over the face of the earth.

The sudden simplification of all his complexities, the disentangling of the web in which he had been struggling, had an immediate and palpable effect upon his appearance. His head was held high again, his eyes were no longer furtive, his step was buoyant. Not for another hour could he delay his reunion with Monimé, and to the astonished proprietress he announced a sudden change of plans, and was gone from the hotel within thirty minutes of his arrival.

He reached Cairo at mid-afternoon upon one of those warm and brilliant days which are the glory of early winter in Egypt, and was soon driving out in the Mena House motor-omnibus along the straight avenue of majestic acacia-trees leading from the city to the Pyramids, in the shadow of which the hotel stands at the foot of the glaring plateau of rock on the edge of the desert.

At the hotel he was told that Monimé was probably to be found at a point about half a mile to the north-west, where she had caused a tent to be erected, and was engaged upon the painting of a desert subject. He was in no mood to wait for her return at

sundown; and, without visiting the bedroom which was assigned to him, he set out at once on foot to find her.

Through the dusty palm-grove behind the hotel he hastened, and up the slope of the sandy hill beyond, from the summit of which he could see the tent standing in the distance amongst the rolling dunes. Thereat he broke into a run, and went leaping down into the little valleys and scrambling up the low hills beyond, like a captive freed from the toils.

A few minutes later, mounting another eminence, he found himself immediately at the back of the tent, and here a native boy, who had been lying drowsing upon the warm sand, rose to his feet, and, in answer to a rapid question, told him that the lady was at work at the doorway of the tent.

Jim hurried forward, his heart beating, and the next moment he was face to face with Monimé.

"Jim!" she exclaimed in astonishment, throwing down her palette and brushes. "My dear boy, I thought you were in England."

"So I was," he laughed. "I was there just two days, and then . . . I gave it up."

He could restrain himself no further. "Oh, Monimé," he cried, and flung his arms about her, kissing her throat and her cheeks and her mouth. She made a momentary show of protest, but her face was smiling; and soon he felt that droop of the limbs and heard that inhalation of the breath, and saw that closing of the eyes which, the world over, are the signs of a woman's capitulation. No further words then were spoken; but, each enfolded in the arms of the other, with lips pressed to lips, they

hung as it were suspended between matter and spirit, while the sun tumbled from the skies, the hills of the desert were shattered, the valleys were cleft in twain, and there came into being for them a new earth and a new heaven.

When at length they stood back from one another, bewildered and spellbound, their whole existence had undergone an irreparable change; and each gazed at the other with unveiled eyes which revealed a naked soul. Now at last, as by an instantaneous flash of the miraculous hand of Nature, she was become blood of his blood, bone of his bone, and they two were for ever merged into one flesh.

Quietly, automatically, she put away her brushes and paints; then, coming back to him as he stood staring at her with a dazed expression upon his swarthy face, she put her arms about his neck and laid her lips upon his mouth.

"I never knew," she whispered, "until you had gone that I belonged to you body and soul."

He threw his head back and laughed in his exaltation. "To-morrow," he said, "I shall go to the Consulate, and notify them that we are going to be married."

She nodded her head calmly. "Yes," she smiled, "I suppose it's too late to do it to-day."

The sun was going down behind the Pyramids as they returned with linked arms to the hotel; and for a moment that sense of foreboding which is so often felt at sunset in the desert, intruded itself upon his dream of happiness. There were banks of menacing cloud gathered upon the horizon; and from the village of El Kafr, at the foot of the Great

Pyramid, there came the far-off throbbing of a drum, a sound which always has in it an element of alarm.

Jim turned to Monimé. "Tell me," he urged, "that you have no doubts left in your mind."

"No, I have no doubts," she answered. "You and I and Ian—we are bound together now right to the end. It is Destiny."

The period of three weeks which, by consular law, had to elapse before the ceremony of their marriage could be performed, was a time of blissful happiness to Jim. The open desert with its wind-swept spaces of glistening sand, and its ranges of low hills which carried the eye ever forward into its mysterious depths, enthralled him like an endless tale of adventure, or like a native flute-song that rises and falls in continuous changing melody. With Monimé he left the hotel each morning, and, having conducted her to her tent, he would wander over the untrodden wastes until the luncheon hour brought him back to her to share their picnic meal. He would come to her again at sundown, and together they would stroll back to civilization in time to see the last flush fade from the domes and minarets of the distant city. Or, when the painter's inspiration failed her, they would mount their camels and go careering into the wilderness, riding through silent valleys and over breezy hills, talking eagerly as they went, and sending their laughter echoing amongst the rocks.

For him it was a lazy, sun-bathed existence, rich in the abundance of their love, and unmarred by any cares. He read in the papers that the trial of Jane Potts would not take place before March; and with

that assurance he returned to his earlier habit of detachment from the world's doings, and did not again trouble even to glance at the news. Life was a new thing to him: it had begun again; and the tragic events of the past were, for the present, able to be forgotten.

Even a favourable letter from the publishers to whom he had sent his poems hardly aroused his excitement, so deeply was he in love. It was a somewhat patronizing letter, in which no great consideration for his artistic sensibilities was manifest. The manuscript was accepted for publication some time in the spring, on moderately satisfactory terms; but it was stated that the firm's discretion must be admitted, and, owing to his inaccessibility, it might be necessary to rely on their own "readers" in the correction of the proofs. He was told, in fact, to leave the matter in their hands, and not to assert himself further than to cable his consent to this agreement; and this he did, without giving two thoughts to the matter. Some ten days later a contract arrived, which he was requested to sign; and having done so, he mailed it back to London, and went his joyous way.

Monimé had been commissioned to paint some pictures of the great rock-temple of Abu Simbel, in Lower Nubia, far up the Nile; and it was therefore decided that they should go there immediately after their marriage, by which time her work in the neighbourhood of the Pyramids would be completed. To this Jim looked forward eagerly; for there was something akin to rapture in the thought of faring forth, alone with his beloved, into distant places,

where they would be undisturbed by the proximity of their entirely superfluous fellow-creatures.

At length the great day arrived, and, driving into Cairo, they were married in ten minutes at the Consulate, and thence they sped across to the English church, where the religious ceremony was quietly performed. That night, as in a dream, they travelled by sleeping-car to Luxor, and, next day, continued their ecstatic way to the Nubian frontier. Here the railroad terminates, and the remainder of the journey, therefore, had to be made by river.

The dahabiyeh which they had chartered awaited them at Shallâl, over against Philæ, just above the First Cataract; and their settling in was much simplified by the fact that the local police officer, sauntering on the wharf, recognized Jim, and at once put himself at their service. He had been in charge of the camel patrol which used to visit the gold mines; and Jim had shown him some kindness, which now he endeavoured to return by a noisy but effective show of his authority and patronage.

The vessel was not large, the interior accommodation consisting of a white-painted saloon, a narrow passage, from which a small cabin and a bathroom led off, and a fair-sized bedroom at the stern. Above their apartments was the deck, across which awnings of richly-coloured Arab tenting were drawn when the ship was not under sail. In the prow were the kitchen and quarters of the native sailors.

Abu Simbel is a hundred and seventy miles up stream from Shallâl; and, sailing from silver dawn to golden sunset, and mooring each night under the jewelled indigo of the skies, the journey occupied

some five enchanted days. The beauty of the rugged country and their own hearts' happiness, caused the hours to pass with the rapidity of a dream. Even the heat of the powerful sun seemed to be mitigated for them by the prevalent north-west wind, which bellied out the great sail and drove the heavy prow forward so that it divided the waters into two singing waves.

Now they sailed past dense and silent groves of palms backed by precipitous rocks; now they shattered the reflections of glacier-like slopes of yellow sand marked by no footprints; and now they glided into the shadow of dark and towering cliffs. Sometimes a ruined and lonely temple of the days of the Pharaohs would drift across the theatre of their vision; sometimes the huts of a village, built upon the shelving sides of a hill, would pass before their eyes and slide away into the distance; and sometimes across the water there would come to their ears the dreamy creaking of a *sâkiyeh*, or water-wheel, and the song of the naked boy who drove the blind-folded oxen round and round its rickety platform.

At length in the darkness of early night they moored under the terrace of the great temple of Abu Simbel, and awoke at daybreak to see from the window of their cabin the four colossal statues of Rameses gazing high across their little vessel towards the dawn.

These mighty figures, sixty feet and more in height, carved out of the face of the cliff, sit in a solemn row, two on each side of the doorway which leads into the vast halls excavated in the living rock. Their serene eyes are fixed upon the eastern horizon,

their lips are a little smiling, their hands rest placidly upon their knees; and now, in the first light of morning, they loomed out of the fading shadow like cold, calm figures of destiny, knowing all that the day would bring forth and finding in that knowledge no cause for vexation.

With a simultaneous impulse Jim and Monimé rose from their bed, and, quickly dressing, hastened up the sandy path to the terrace of the temple, that they might see the first rays of the sun strike upon those great, unblinking eyes.

They had not long to wait. Suddenly a warm flush suffused the pale, rigid faces, a flush that did not seem to be thrown from the sunrise. It was as though some internal flame of vitality had transmuted the hard rock into living flesh; it was as though the blood were coursing through the solid stone, and miraculous, monstrous life were come into being at the touch of the god of the sun. The eyes seemed to open wider, the lips to be about to open, the nostrils to dilate. . . .

Monimé clasped hold of Jim's hand. "They are going to speak," she exclaimed. "They are going to rise up from their four thrones."

In awe they stood, a little Hop o' my Thumb and his wife, staring up out of the blue shadows of the terrace to the huge, flushed faces above them. But the miracle was quickly ended. The sun ascended from behind the eastern hills, and in its full radiance the colossal figures were once more turned to inanimate stone, to wait until to-morrow's recurrence of that one supreme moment in which the pulse of life is vouchsafed to them.

Chapter XIX: LOVE IN THE WILDERNESS

DURING the day the dahabiyeh was towed a few yards to the south of the great bluff of rock in which the temple is cut, and was moored in a small, secluded bay, where it would be sheltered from the prying eyes of tourists who would be coming ashore from the weekly steamer. Here, on the one side, there were slopes of sand topped by palms and acacias, behind which were precipitous cliffs; and, on the other, the wide river stretched out to the opposite bank, where, amongst the trees at the foot of the rocky hills, stood the brown huts of the village of Farêk.

It was a hot little cove, and by day the sun beat down from cloudless blue skies upon the white dahabiyeh; but the richly-coloured awnings protected the deck, and a constant breeze brought a delectable coolness through the open windows of the cabins below, fluttering the little green silk curtains and gently swinging the hanging lamps. By night the moon and the stars shone down from the amazing vault of the heavens, and were reflected with such clarity in the still water of the bay that the vessel seemed to be floating in mid-air with planets above and below.

A scramble over the sand and the boulders around the foot of the headland brought one to the terraced forecourt of the temple where sat the four colossal statues; and at the side of this there was a mighty

slope of golden sand, sweeping down from the summit of the cliffs, as though in an attempt to engulf the whole temple. A laborious climb up this drift led to the flat, open desert, which extended away into the distance, until, sharply defined against the intense blue of the sky, the far hills of the horizon shut off the boundless and vacant spaces of the Sahara beyond.

It was a place which, save at the coming of the tourist steamers, was isolated from the modern world: a place of ancient memories, where Hathor, goddess of love and local patroness of these hills, might be supposed still to gaze out from the shadows of the rocks with languorous, cow-like eyes, and to cast the spell of her influence upon all who chanced to tread this holy ground.

Of all the celestial beings worshipped by mankind this goddess must surely make the fullest appeal to a man in love, for she is the deification of the eternal feminine; and Jim, having lately studied something of the old Egyptian religion, deemed it almost a predestined fate that had brought him to this territory dedicated to a goddess who personified those very qualities that he loved in Monimé.

Hathor, the Ashtaroth and the Istar of Asia, was the patroness of all women. Identified with Isis, her worship extended in time to Rome, where she was at last absorbed into the Christian lore and became one with the Madonna, so that even to this day, in another guise, she accepts the adoration of countless millions.

Here at Abu Simbel, in her aspect as Lady of the Western Hills, she received into her divine arms

each evening the descending sun, and tended him, as a woman tends a man, at the end of his day's journey. As goddess of those who, like the sun, passed down in death to the nether regions, she appeared as a mysterious saviour amidst the foliage of her sacred sycamore, and gave water to their thirsty souls; while to the living she was the mistress of love and laughter, she was the presiding spirit at every marriage, she was the succouring midwife and the tender nurse at the birth of every child, and upon her broad bosom every dying creature laid its weary head.

In this charmed region, where yellow rocks and golden sand, green trees and blue waters, were met together under the azure sky, which again was one of the aspects of Hathor, Jim passed his days in supreme happiness, now working with tremendous mental energy at some poem which he was composing, now tramping for miles over the high plateau of the desert, whistling and singing as he went, and now basking in the sun upon the terrace of the temple where Monimé was painting. The benign influence of the great goddess seemed to act upon them, for daily their love grew stronger, working at them, as it were, with pliant hands, until it smoothed out their every thought and rounded their every action.

Each week the post-boat on its way to Wady Halfa delivered to them a letter from England in which Ian's nurse gave them news of her charge; but this was almost their only connection with the outside world, for they usually avoided the temple when the weekly party of tourists were ashore. Eagerly they read these letters, which told of the

boy's boisterous health in the vigorous air of an English watering-place; and afterwards they would sit hand-in-hand talking of him and of his future. Jim was immensely proud of his son, and many were the plans that developed in his head for the child's happiness and good standing. It would not be long now before he would be able to confess to Monimé his true name and position, and to tell her that a home and an income were assured to the boy.

Love is a kind of interpreter of the beauties of nature; and in these sun-bathed days Jim's heart seemed to be opened to a greater appreciation of the wonders of creation than he had ever known before. In the winter season there is an amazing brilliancy of colour in a Nubian landscape, and the air is so clear that to him it seemed as though he were ever looking at some vast kaleidoscopic pattern of glittering jewels set in green and blue and gold, to which his brain responded with radiant scintillations of feeling.

In whatever direction his eyes chanced to turn he found some sight to charm him. Now it was a kingfisher hovering in mid-air beside the dahabiyeh, or falling like a stone into the water; now it was a bronzed goatherd, flute in hand, wandering with his flock under the acacias beside the water; and now it was a desert hare, with its little white tail, bounding away over the plateau at the summit of the cliffs. Sometimes a great flight of red flamingos would pass slowly across the blue sky; or in the darkness of the night the whirr of unseen wings would tell of the migration of a flock of wild duck. Sometimes in his rambles he would disturb the slum-

bers of a little jackal, which would go scuttling off into the desert, while he waved his hand to it. Or again, a lizard basking on a rock, or a pair of white butterflies dancing in the sunlit air, would hold him for a moment enthralled.

The grasses and creepers which grew amidst the tumbled boulders at the edge of the Nile would now attract his attention; and again a great palm, spreading its rustling branches to the sunlight and casting a liquid blue shadow upon the ground, would hold his gaze. Here there was the ribbed back of a sand-drift to delight him with its symmetry; there a distant headland jutting out into the mirror of the water. Sometimes he would lie face downwards upon the sand to admire the vari-coloured pebbles and fragments of stone—gypsum, quartz, flint, cornelian, diorite, syenite, hæmatite, serpentine, granite, and so forth; and sometimes he would go racing over the desert, bewitched by the riotous north wind itself and the sparkle of the air.

But ever he came back at length to the woman who, like the presiding Hathor, was the fount of this overflowing happiness of his heart. In the glory of the day he watched her as she walked in the sunlight, the breeze fluttering her pretty dress, or as she slid with him, laughing, down the slope of the great sand-drift beside the temple; or again as she ran hand-in-hand with him along the edge of the river after a morning swim, her black hair let down and tossing about her shoulders.

By night he watched her as she stood in the starlight, like a mysterious spirit of this ancient land; or as she came out from the dark halls of the temple,

like the goddess herself, gliding towards him in a moonbeam with divine white arms extended, and the smile of everlasting love upon her shadowed lips. In the dim light of their cabin he saw her as she lay by his side, her eyes reflecting the gleam of the stars, the perfect curve of her breast scarcely apparent save to his touch, and her whispered words coming to him out of the veil of the midnight.

It is not easy to select from the nebulous narrative of these secluded days any particular occurrence which may here be recorded; yet there was no lack of incident, no dulness, no stagnation, such as he had experienced in the seclusion of Eversfield. Towards sunset one afternoon he and she were walking together upon the high desert at the summit of the cliffs, and were traversing an area which in Pharaonic days was used as a cemetery. Here there are a number of small square tomb-shafts cut perpendicularly into the flat surface of the rock, at the bottom of which the mummies of the Nubian princes of this district were interred. These burials have all been ransacked in past ages by thieves in search of the golden ornaments which were placed upon the bodies; and now the shafts lie open, partially filled with blown sand.

Presently Jim paused to throw a stone at a mark which chanced to present itself; but, missing his aim, he picked up a handful of pebbles and threw them one by one at his target until his idle purpose was accomplished. Meanwhile Monimé had strolled ahead, and Jim now ran forward to overtake her. The setting sun, however, dazzled his eyes, and suddenly he stumbled at the brink of one of these open tombs. There was a confused moment in

which he clutched desperately at the edge of the rock, and then, falling backwards, his head struck the side of the shaft, and he went crashing to the bottom, twenty feet below, landing upon the soft sand with a thud which seemed to shake the very teeth in his jaws.

For some moments he sat dazed, while little points of light danced before his eyes, and the blood slowly ran down his cheek from a wound amidst his hair. Then he looked around him at the four solid walls which imprisoned him, and up at the square of the blue sky above him, and swore aloud at himself for a fool.

A few seconds later the horrified face of Monimé came into view at the top of the shaft, and, to reassure her, he broke into laughter, telling her he was unhurt and describing how the accident had happened.

"But your head's bleeding," she cried in anguish. "Where's your handkerchief?"

"Haven't got one," he laughed. "Lend me yours."

She threw down to him an absurd little wisp of cambric, with which he endeavoured vainly to staunch the red flow.

"It's nothing," he said. "It's only a little cut. How the devil am I to get out of this?"

She plied him with anxious questions; and presently, recklessly ripping off the flounce of her muslin dress, she tossed it to him, telling him to bandage the wound with it.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go back to the boat," he said, "and get a rope and a sailor to hold it. I'm most awfully sorry."

She would not go for help until she had satisfied

herself that he was in no danger; and when at last she left him it was with the assurance that she would be back with all possible speed.

"Try rolling down the big sand-drift," he said, anxious to be jocular. "It's the quickest way. I did it yesterday, and was down in no time. It's a pity you haven't a tea-tray about you: it makes a fine toboggan."

But when he was alone he leant heavily against the wall, feeling dizzy from the loss of blood and suffering considerable pain. Presently his attention was attracted by one of those hard, black desert beetles which are to be seen so frequently in Egypt parading busily over the sand with creaking armour: it was hurrying to and fro at the foot of the wall, vainly seeking for a way of escape from the prison into which it had evidently tumbled but a short time before. Upon the sand around him there were the dried remains of others of its tribe which had fallen down the shaft and had perished of starvation; and in one corner there was the skeleton of a jerboa which had died in like manner.

For a considerable time he sat staring stupidly at this beetle and mopping his head with the muslin flounce; but at last Monimé returned with two native sailors, who speedily lowered a rope to him. To climb the twenty feet to the surface, however, was no easy matter in his stiff and exhausted condition; and very laboriously he pulled himself up, barking his shins and his knuckles painfully against the rock.

He had nearly reached the top when suddenly he remembered the imprisoned beetle; and his fertile imagination pictured, as in a flash, its lingering death. "Wait a minute," he said, "I've forgotten some-

thing." And down the rope he slid to the bottom, while Monimé wrung her hands above.

He picked up the beetle. "Come along, old sport," he whispered. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten all about you." He placed the little creature in the pocket of his coat, and once more began the painful ascent. The exertion, however, had opened the wound again, and now the blood ran down his face as he strained and swung on the rope. His strength seemed to have deserted him, and had it not been for the two sailors who drew him up bodily as he clung, and at last caught hold of him under the arms, he would have fallen back into the shaft.

No sooner had he reached the surface than he carefully took the beetle from his pocket, and sent it on its way. Then turning to Monimé, who had knelt on the ground, he obeyed her order to lie down and place his head upon her knee, whereupon she began to bathe the wound with water from a bottle she had brought with her. She had also remembered, even in her haste, to bring scissors and bandages; and now with deft fingers she cut away the hair from around the wound, and bound up his head with almost professional skill.

The two sailors were presently sent back to the dahabiyeh, and, as soon as they were out of sight, she bent over his upturned face and kissed him again and again. To his great surprise he felt her tears upon his cheek.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked, tenderly passing the back of his hand across her eyes. "Did I give you an awful fright?"

"No, it isn't that," she answered, trying to smile. "I'm only being sentimental. I was thinking about

your beetle, and about the text in the Bible that says, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . .'

It was not many days before Jim had fully recovered from his hurts. The bracing air of Lower Nubia at this season of the year is not conducive to sickness. The vigorous north-west wind seems to sweep the mind clear of all suggestion of ailment, and the sun to purge it of even the thought of infirmity. Monimé, indeed, had difficulty in persuading him to submit at all to her ministrations, dear though they were to him; for the heart is here set upon the idea of physical well-being, and nature thus heals herself.

Sometimes, as Jim walked upon the cliffs in the splendour of the day, his nerves tingling with the joy of life, his thoughts went back to those long years at Eversfield, and he compared his present attitude of mind with that he had known at the manor. There the grey steeples and towers of Oxford, seen beyond the haze of the trees, were sedative and subduing. There the passionate heart was tempered, the violent thought was sobered, the emotions were quieted.

But here the brilliant sunlight, the sparkling air, and the great open spaces, induced a grand heedlessness, a fine improvidence, a riotous prodigality of the forces of life. Here a man lived, and knew no more than that he lived; nor did he care what things the future held in store for him. During these weeks Jim gave no thought to his coming movements, save in a very general way. His mind leapt across the abyss of difficulties which lay in his

path, and arrived at the fair places beyond, where Monimé and Ian were to travel hand-in-hand with him.

His attitude towards his little son was shaping itself in his mind at this time into some sort of clear recognition of his parental responsibilities, vague perhaps, but none the less sincere. As an instance of this development in his character mention may be made of a certain sunset hour in which he and Monimé were seated together upon the high ground overlooking the vast expanse of the desert to westward of the Nile.

In this direction, behind the far horizon, lay the unexplored Sahara, extending in awful solitude across the whole African continent to its western shores, three thousand miles away. For a thousand miles and more this vast and almost uninhabited land of silence is known as the Libyan Desert. Behind this is the great Tuareg country, extending for another fifteen hundred miles; and beyond this lies the ancient land of Mauretania, where at last, in the region of Rio de Oro, there is again a populated country.

In no other part of the world can a man stand facing so huge a tract of uncharted country, and nowhere does the call of the unknown come with such insistence to the ears of the imagination. In this untenanted area there is room for many an undiscovered kingdom, and hidden somewhere amidst its barren hills and plains there may be cities and peoples cut off from the outer world these many thousands of years.

It is the largest of the world's remaining areas

of mystery; it is the greatest of all the regions still to be explored; for the sterile and waterless desert holds its secrets secure by the fear of hunger and the terror of thirst. The inhabitants of the Nile Valley declare to a man that somewhere in this wilderness there stands a city of gold, whose shining cupolas and domes are as dazzling as the sun itself, and whose streets are paved with precious stones.

Jim had often talked to the natives in regard to this lost city, and all had assured him that it truly existed, though no living eyes had seen it.

On this particular occasion, as he watched the sun go down amidst the distant hills which were the first outworks in the defences of these impregnable secrets, he was overwhelmed with the desire to penetrate, if only for a few hundred miles, into this mysterious territory, and eagerly he spoke to Monimé in regard to the possibilities of such an expedition.

She sighed. "I shouldn't be able to come with you, Jim," she said, "however much I should long to do so. I have to consider Ian first."

"Yes," he answered at once. "I was not really speaking seriously. The thought of what may lie hidden over there sets one dreaming; but actually I wouldn't feel it right now to go hunting for fabulous cities."

He spoke with sincerity, and it was only after the words were uttered that he realized the change which had taken place in his outlook. No longer was he free to act as he chose: he had to consider the interests of another, and, strange to relate, he was quite willing to do so.

Chapter XX: THE ARM OF THE LAW

AT high noon upon a morning towards the end of January, Jim happened to saunter across the hot sand to the terrace of the temple where Monimé was painting, and there found her engaged in conversation with a benevolent, grey-bearded clergyman and a stout, beaming woman who appeared to be his wife, both of whom wore blue spectacles, carried large white umbrellas lined with green, and wore pith helmets adorned with green veiling—appurtenances which stamped them as tourists. Jim himself was somewhat disreputably dressed, having a slouch hat pulled over his eyes, a canvas shirt open at the neck, a pair of well-worn flannel trousers held up by an old leather belt, and red native slippers upon his bare feet, and he therefore hesitated to approach.

Monimé, however, beckoned to him to come to her, and, when he had done so, introduced him to her new friends, whose acquaintance, it was explained, she had made an hour previously. The clergyman, it appeared, whose name was Jones, was a man of some wealth who was now touring these upper reaches of the Nile on a small private steamer, in search of the good health of which his work in the underworld of London had deprived him; and Monimé, in taking the trouble to show him and his wife around the temple, perhaps had a woman's eye

to business, for a painter, after all, has wares for sale, and is dependent on the conversion of all colours into plain gold.

Be this as it may, she now invited them to luncheon upon the dahabiyeh, and Jim, not to be churlish, was obliged to support the suggestion with every mark of assent.

The meal was served under the awnings, and when coffee had been drunk Monimé took Mrs. Jones down to the saloon, while the two men were left to smoke on deck. Jim was in a communicative mood, and for some time entertained his guest with narrations of his adventures in many lands, being careful, however, to draw a veil over the years he had spent in England. The clergyman responded, at length, with tales of his life in the slums, expressing the opinion that, owing to the failure of the Church to adapt itself to the exigencies of the present day, callousness in regard to crime was on the increase.

"Here's an instance of what I mean," he said. "I was walking late one night along a well-known London street when I was accosted by a young woman who, in spite of my cloth and my age, made certain suggestions to me. I was so astounded that I stopped and spoke to her, and presently she confessed to me that this was the first time she had ever done such a thing, but that she was engaged to be married to a penniless man, and somehow money had to be obtained. Now there's callousness for you! Can you imagine such a proceeding?"

"Yes, that's pretty low down," Jim answered. "What did you do?"

The clergyman smiled. "Ah, that is another

story," he said. "To test her I told her to come to my house the next day and to bring her fiancé with her; and to my surprise they turned up. Well, to cut the story short, I agreed to set them up in business, and I gave them quite a large sum of money for the purpose, hardly expecting, however, that it would prove anything but a dead loss. You may imagine my gratification, therefore, when I began to receive regular quarterly repayments, each accompanied by a gracious little letter of thanks stating that things were prospering splendidly. At last the whole debt was paid off, and the woman came to see me, smartly dressed, and in the best of spirits. I congratulated her on her honesty, and told her that her action had strengthened my belief in the basic goodness of human nature."

" 'Well, you see,' she said, 'we felt we ought to pay our debt to you, as we had made in the business ten times the original sum you gave us.' "

" 'And what is the business?' I asked. "

" 'Oh,' she said, 'we are running a brothel.' "

Jim leant back in his chair and laughed. "That's an instance of the evils of indiscriminate charity," he said.

"It is a sign of the times," his guest replied, seriously. "Look at the callous crimes of which we read in the newspapers. Take, for instance, the Eversfield case."

Jim's heart seemed to stop beating. "I haven't been reading the papers lately," he stammered. "I haven't heard . . ." His voice failed him.

"Oh, it's a shocking case," said Mr. Jones, but to Jim his words were as though they came from a

great distance or were heard above the noise of a tempest. "A young woman, the lady of the manor, was found murdered in her own woods, and at first the police thought that the crime had been committed by a certain Jane Potts who was jealous of her. But she proved her innocence, and then the mother of the murdered woman, a Mrs. Darling, admitted that her daughter's husband, who had been supposed to be dead, was actually alive, and had visited his wife on the day of the crime. It seems that he had wanted to rid himself of her by divorce, but something happened which induced him to kill her instead."

Jim's brain was seething. "But if he was guilty, why did he go to see Mrs. Darling afterwards?" he asked.

"Oh, then you have read about the case," said his guest, glancing at him quickly.

Jim struggled inwardly to be calm and to rectify his mistake. "Yes," he answered, "I remember it now."

Mr. Jones bent forward in his chair and tapped his host's knee. "Mark my words," he declared, "that man is an out-and-out villain. He had deserted his wife, and had let it be thought that he was dead; and then, I suppose because he was short of money, he came home, and murdered her when she refused to give him any. My theory is that he believed he had been seen by somebody, and therefore determined to brazen it out by calling on his mother-in-law. He is evidently of the callous kind."

Jim had the feeling that he himself, his ego, had become detached from his brain's consciousness.

Distantly, he could hear every word that was being said, yet at the same time his mind was in confusion, in pandemonium. He looked down from afar off at his body, and wondered whether the trembling of his hand was noticeable. He could listen to himself speaking, and desperately he struggled to control his words.

"What d'you think will happen?" he asked, passing his fingers to and fro across his lips. The sudden dryness of his mouth had produced a sort of click in his words which he endeavoured thus to mitigate.

"Oh, they'll catch him in time," Mr. Jones replied, "though Mrs. Darling's reprehensible conduct in keeping the facts to herself for so long has helped him to get clear away. His description is in all the papers—dark hair and eyes; clean-shaven; sallow complexion; athletic build; five foot ten in height. . . ."

Jim smiled in a sickly manner. "That might describe me," he said, and laughed.

"Yes," Mr. Jones responded, "I'm afraid it's not much to go on; but they'll get him, believe me. I expect they'll publish a photograph soon."

Jim drew his breath between his teeth, and again his heart seemed to be arrested in its beating. He wanted to rise from his chair and to run from the dahabiyeh. It seemed to him that his agitation must be wholly apparent to his guest: a man's entire life could not be shattered and fall to pieces in such utter ruin with no outward sign of the devastation.

He was about to make a move of some sort to end the ordeal when Monimé appeared upon the steps leading up from the saloon, and invited Mr.

Jones to come down to see some of her paintings. He rose at once to comply; and thereupon Jim lurched from his chair, and, holding on to the table before him, looked wildly towards the slopes of golden sand which could be seen between the varicoloured hangings.

Monimé came over to him as the clergyman disappeared down the stairs. "Hullo, Jim," she said, "you look ill, dear. Is anything the matter?"

He tried to laugh. "No," he answered sharply. "Why should you think so? I'm all right—only rather bored by your talkative friend."

She put her arm about him and kissed him: then, suddenly standing back from him, she looked anxiously into his face. "You *are* ill," she said. "Your forehead is burning hot. You've been out in the sun without your hat. Oh, Jim, you are so careless!"

For a moment his knees gave way under him, and he swayed visibly as he stood. "I'm all right, I tell you," he gasped. "Go and show them your pictures."

Monimé's consternation was not able to be concealed. "Oh, my darling," she cried, "you're feverish! You must go and lie down. I'll get rid of these people presently: I'll tell them you are not well. . . ."

Jim interrupted her. "No, no!—don't say anything. I assure you it's nothing. I'll be all right in a few minutes. I'll just sit here quietly."

He pushed her from him, and obliged her, presently, to leave him; but no sooner was she gone than he hastened to the *zir*, or large porous earthenware

vessel, which stood at the end of the deck and in which the "drinks" were kept cool, and, selecting a bottle of whisky, poured a stiff dose into a tumbler, swallowing the draught in two or three hasty gulps. Thus fortified, he paced to and fro, staring before him with unseeing eyes, until Monimé and their guests returned.

His anxiety not to appear ill at ease in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Jones led him to talk rapidly upon a variety of disconnected subjects; but his relief was great when, with umbrellas raised and blue spectacles adjusted, they took their departure and walked away over the hot sand towards their own vessel. Thereupon he hastened to assure Monimé that his indisposition had passed; and soon he had the satisfaction of observing that her anxieties were allayed. But when she had gone back to her painting at the temple, he left the dahabiyeh, and, scrambling up the sand-drift like one demented, went running over the vacant, sun-scorched plateau at the summit of the cliffs, flinging himself at length upon the ground, where no eyes save those of the circling vultures might see his abject misery, and no ears might hear his groans.

In the days which followed he so far mastered his emotions as to give his wife no great cause for worry; but from time to time he could see in her troubled face her consciousness that all was not well. On such occasions the extremity of human wretchedness seemed to be reached, and the weight upon his heart and mind was almost intolerable.

It was not personal fear of the scaffold that spread this horror along every nerve and through every

vein of his body: it was the thought that he would not be able to avoid involving Monimé and their son in the catastrophe, and that not only would he disgrace them, but would alienate them from him completely. He realized now the enormity of his offence in holding back from Monimé the truth about his former marriage and in shutting her out from his confidences.

What would she do when she learnt the facts? Could she possibly understand and forgive? Would the pain that he was to bring upon her turn her love into hatred and contempt? Would she, the passionate mother, forgive the wrong he had done to their son in placing this stigma upon him?

Thoughts such as these drove him to the brink of madness; and the need of secrecy and of facing the situation by himself produced an unbearable sense of loneliness in his mind. He recalled the verse in the Book of Genesis which reads: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.'" If only he could tell her now, pour out his heart to her, and see in her tender eyes the overwhelming sweetness of her understanding. . . . But he dared not: he must fight this battle alone.

Gradually there developed in his brain the thought of suicide. Were he now to destroy himself in some manner which would suggest an accident, it would be Jim Easton who would be laid in the grave, without a stain upon his public memory; and the lost James Tundering-West, the supposed murderer, would not be connected in any way with Monimé or Ian. Without question this was the

only solution of the problem; this was the only honourable course to follow, and follow it he must.

He found in this resolution a means of steadying his mind and of regaining to some extent his equilibrium. There was a fortnight yet before their return to the lower reaches of the Nile would bring matters towards their final phase. Monimé wished to go to Europe as soon as her work was finished, in order to be with Ian again; and it would not be necessary for Jim to put an end to himself, therefore, until he came within reach of the arm of the law. Here at Abu Simbel he could easily avoid seeing any of his fellow men who might visit the temple from the tourist steamers; and, fortunately, his friend the police officer at Shallâl who had helped him to embark on the dahabiyeh, knew him these many years as Mr. Easton, presumably a resident in Egypt, and would vouch for him if occasion arose. Very possibly he might reach Cairo or even the homeward-bound liner without detection. Then, an accidental fall at midnight from the deck into the sea—and his obligation would be honourably fulfilled.

Yes, that was it: that was his obligation. For the first time in his life he understood thoroughly and wholly the meaning of the word. "It is my duty," he muttered over and over again. "It is my duty at all costs to prevent any scandal which would hurt Monimé or Ian." He had so often asked himself the meaning of that strange term "duty," and now he knew. Love had taught him.

Fortunately, Monimé was very hard at work on the completion of her paintings, and he was therefore able to go away alone into the desert for hours

at a time, under the pretence of writing his verses, and thus obtain a respite from the strain of appearing cheerful and normal. The great untenanted spaces soothed the clamour of his brain; and, wandering there alone over the golden sand or the shelving rocks, in the blazing sunlight, between the vacancy of earth and the void of heaven, there passed into his mind a kind of calmness which remained with him when Monimé was again at his side.

But the nights were made fearful to him lest in his sleep he should reveal his secret. He would lie awake hour after hour in the darkness, while Monimé slept peacefully, her head upon his encircling arm, her black hair tumbled about his shoulder, her breast against his breast, and he would not dare to shut his eyes. Sometimes, his weariness overcoming his will, he would drop into oblivion, only to waken again with a start which caused her to turn or to mutter in her slumbers. Once he woke up thus, knowing that he had just uttered the words "Not guilty," and in an agony of fear he waited, propped on his elbow, to ascertain whether she had heard him or not. She was asleep, however, and with beating pulse he fell back at length upon the pillows, the cold sweat upon his face.

During these days, which he recognized as his last upon earth, he allowed himself to drown his sorrow in the full flood of his love; and, like the waves of the sea, he overwhelmed Monimé in the tide of his adoration, sweeping her along with him so that there were times when the breath of life seemed to fail them, and the silent rapture of their hearts had near kinship with the quiescence of death.

There were times when it was as though he were eager to die upon her lips, and so to pass in ecstasy into the hollow acreage of heaven. There were times when by the might of his passion he seemed to lift her, clasped in his arms, into the regions beyond the planets, there to revolve in the exaltation of dream, round and round the universe, until the sound of the last trump should hurl their inseparable souls headlong into the abyss of time and space.

But between these spells of enchantment there were periods of deep and horrible gloom in which he cursed himself for his mistakes, and railed against man and God.

"How I hate myself!" he muttered. "Life is like a prison cell where you and your deadly enemy are locked in together."

Standing at the summit of the cliffs above the temple, he would shake his fists at the blue depths of the sky, or, with bronzed arms folded, would stare down at the rippling waters of the Nile, and kick the pebbles over the precipice. Occasionally, too, he turned for comfort to his guitar; and at the river's brink, or in the shade of an acacia tree, he would sit twanging the strings and singing some outlandish song, his head bent over the instrument and his dark hair falling over his face.

As the day of their departure drew near these periods of gloom increased in frequency, and he was often aware that the troubled eyes of his wife were fixed upon him, while, more than once, she questioned him in regard to his health. His mirror revealed to him the haggard appearance of his face, and in order to prevent this becoming too apparent

he was obliged to manœuvre his position so that, when Monimé was facing him, his back should be to the light.

At length the dreaded hour arrived. Upon the glaring face of the waters the little puffing steam-tug, which had been ordered by them for this date, came into sight, bearing down upon them as they sat at breakfast on deck; and soon it was heading northwards again, towing their dahabiyeh in its wake towards the First Cataract which marks the frontier of Egypt proper. For the greater part of the two days' journey Jim sat listlessly watching the banks of the river as they glided by; but when at last Shallâl, their destination, was reached he pulled himself together to meet the last crisis, and, by the exertion of the power of his will, managed to appear as a normal being.

They made no halt upon their way; but, after sleeping for the last time upon their dahabiyeh, moored near the railway station, they transferred themselves and their baggage to the morning train, and arrived at Luxor as the sun went down.

When they entered the large hotel where they were to spend the night Jim hid his face as best he could from the little groups of tourists gathered about the hall, and, telling Monimé that his head ached, hastened up the stairs to the room which had been assigned to them.

But as he was about to enter, his destiny descended upon him. A door further along the passage opened, and a moment later, to his horror, the fat, well-remembered figure of Mrs. Darling faced him in the bright illumination of the electric light. He

saw her start, he saw her eyes open wide in surprise, and, with a gasp, he dashed forward into his room, and slammed the door behind him.

Monimé had preceded him, and her back was turned as he staggered forward and fell into an armchair, his face as white as the whitewashed walls. She was busying herself with the baggage, and did not look in his direction for some moments. When at length she glanced at him he had nearly recovered from the first force of the shock, and she saw only a tired man mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

Chapter XXI: THE LAST KICK

WHEN the gong sounded for dinner, Jim protested to Monimé that he was ill and did not wish to change his clothes and come down. For a while he had hoped, in his madness, that when Mrs. Darling saw him again he would be able to look straight at her and deny that he was her son-in-law. "I evidently have a double," he would say. "My name is Easton, madam; the proprietor of the hotel will tell you that he has known me as such for the last five years." A fact, indeed, which was beyond dispute, for he had stayed here before he went to the gold mines.

But now that the time had come he realized that this was fantastic, and his one idea was to get away, so that he might make an end of himself in decent privacy. He was not a coward: he was not afraid of death or physical suffering. But with all his soul he dreaded captivity or enforcement of any kind. The possibility of being chased into a corner, of being handcuffed and put behind bolts and bars, of being compelled and constrained, and finally led, pinioned, to the gallows, filled him with horrible terror.

One of the most common forms in which a breakdown of the nervous system shows itself is that known as claustrophobia, a fear of being shut up or surrounded and fettered. It is a primitive and primeval dread to which the disordered conscious-

ness leaps back; it is a survival of the days, æons ago, when man was both hunter and prey of man; it is, in essence, the fear of the trap.

Monimé, from whom his mental torture could not be altogether concealed, looked at him with troubled, anxious eyes. "Oh, Jim," she said, "what is the matter with you? There's something dreadful on your mind; there's something worrying you, and you won't tell me about it."

"No, there's nothing, I assure you," he answered, in quick denial. She must never know, for knowledge of the whole miserable business might bring contempt, and her love for him might be killed. Of all his terrors the terror of losing her love was the most unbearable.

"Come down to dinner, dear," she persuaded. "It will do you good." She bent down and looked intently at him as he sat on the edge of the bed, scraping the carpet with his feet and staring at the floor, his eyes wild with alarm. "It isn't that you are afraid of meeting somebody you don't want to see, is it?"

His heart seemed to stop beating for a moment as he denied the suggestion. She was beginning to guess, she was beginning to suspect.

"Oh, very well, then," he said, unable to meet her gaze. "I'll come down. Perhaps, as you say, it'll do me good."

There was the black murk of damnation now in his soul, lit only by the glow of his fighting instinct. The crisis of terror was passing, and now he was determined not to be caught. "Go on down, darling," he said. "I'll follow you in a moment."

She put her arms about him and kissed him, smoothing his forehead with her cool hand. "Whatever it is that is troubling you," she whispered, "remember always that I love you, and shall go to my grave loving you and you only."

He closed his eyes, and for a while his head lay upon her breast, like that of an exhausted child. All the brawn of life had been knocked out of him. Every hope, every dream, every vestige of content had gone from him; and in these pitiable straits he desired only to shut out the world, and to obtain, if but for a moment, a respite from the horror of actuality.

As soon as he was alone he went to his portmanteau, and took from it his revolver, which he loaded and placed in his pocket. His intention had been to appear to meet with an accidental death, but if he had left it now till too late, he would have to blow his brains out. A Bedouin wanderer such as he, he muttered to himself, must, at any rate, never be taken alive: a son of the open road must never be led captive.

For a moment he stood irresolute at the open door of his room, and the sweat gleamed upon his forehead. Then he braced himself, and walked down the stairs. Monimé was not far ahead of him, and, as he turned the corner to descend the last flight which led down into the front hall, she paused at the foot of the steps to wait for him.

He saw her standing there in the light of a large electric globe, her black hair as vivid as a strong colour, her skin white like marble, her eyes occult in their serenity, her lips smiling encouragement to

him; but in the same glance he saw also a group of persons standing before the cashier's office in the otherwise empty hall, and instantly he knew that the crisis of his life was upon him.

There, fat but alert, stood Mrs. Darling, still wearing day-dress and hat; beside her was a quiet-looking Englishman who was the British Consul, and with whom Jim had had dealings in his gold-mining days; on her other hand was an Egyptian police-officer; and next to him was the proprietor of the hotel, whose face was turned in contemplation of the native policeman standing at the main entrance. It was evident on the instant that as soon as Mrs. Darling had caught sight of him on his arrival she had communicated with the police, who, in their turn, had fetched the Consul.

As Jim appeared at the head of the stairs Mrs. Darling clutched at the Consul's arm. "There he is!" she exclaimed excitedly, pointing an accusing finger at him. "That's the man!"

He saw Monimé swing round and face them; he saw the policeman put his hand to his hip-pocket, and turn to the Consul for instructions; and, as though a flame had been set to straw, his anger blazed up into unreasoning, passionate hate of all that these people stood for.

Instantly he whipped out his revolver and shouted to them: "Put up your hands, or I shoot!" at the same time running downstairs and straight at them across the hall—a wild, grey-flannelled figure, his dark hair tumbling over his pallid face, and his eyes burning like coals of fire. All the hands in the

group went up together, and he saw Mrs. Darling's face grow livid with alarm.

Monimé ran forward. "Jim! Oh, Jim!" she cried, trying to seize his arm.

"I'm innocent!" he gasped. "But I won't be taken alive by a damned set of bungling parasites."

Still covering them with his revolver he backed towards the garden entrance, and the next moment was out in the chill night air and running like a madman down the path between the palms and shrubs. The darkness was intense, and more than once he fell into the flower-beds, kicking the soft earth in all directions. He heard shouts and cries behind, but the thunder of his own brain rendered these meaningless as he dashed onwards under the stars.

Soon he came to the back wall of the garden, and this he scaled like a cat, dropping into the narrow lane on the other side and continuing his flight between the walls of the silent native huts and enclosures. At length he emerged, breathless, into the open space not far from the railway-station, where, under a flickering street-lamp, a two-horsed carriage was standing awaiting hire.

He hailed the red-fezzed driver with as much composure as he could command, and told him to drive "like the wind" to the temple of Karnak. This, at any rate, would take him clear of the town, and near the open fields; and to the driver he would seem to be but a somewhat impatient Cook's tourist, anxious to see the ruins by night. Perhaps there was no need to kill himself: he might go into hiding and ultimately fly to the uttermost ends of the earth.

As the carriage lurched and swayed along the embanked road, he turned in his seat to watch for his pursuers; but there was no sign of them. Yet this fact now brought no comfort to him. With returning sanity he realized clearly enough that escape was impossible. Were he to hide in the desert, the Ababdeh trackers, always employed by the police in these districts, would soon hunt him down. Were he to take refuge amongst the natives, his hiding-place would be revealed in a few hours in response to the official offer of a reward. And, anyway, to abandon Monimé, and to have no likely means of communicating with her, would make the smart of life unbearable.

There was no way out, and his present flight resolved itself into a wild attempt to obtain breathing space in which to prepare himself for the end, and, if possible, to see Monimé once again to bid her farewell. The jury at home would be bound to find him guilty: the evidence was too damning. Some tramp had murdered Dolly, and was now lost for ever; or else, and more probably, Merrivall's house-keeper had actually done it, but was now unalterably acquitted. It was certain that he would be hanged in the end, and it would therefore be far better to finish it this very night.

In these moments he drank the cup of bitterness to the dregs; and the comparative calmness which now succeeded his frenzy was the calmness of utter despair. Thus, when the driver pulled up his horses in the darkness before the towering pylons of the main gateway of the temple of Karnak, Jim paid him off and approached the ancient courts of Ammon,

determined only to keep his pursuers at bay until he could make his confession to Monimé and die in the peace of her forgiveness.

The watchman at the gateway, being used to the eccentric ways of the foreigner, admitted him without comment, and left him to wander alone amongst the vast black ruins, which were massed around him in a silence broken only by the distant yelping of the jackals and the nearer hooting of the owls. Through the roofless Hypostyle Hall he went, a desolate little figure, dwarfed into insignificance by the stupendous pillars which mounted up about him into the stars; and here, presently, he stood for a while with arms outstretched and face upturned, in an agony of supplication.

"O Almighty You," he prayed, "Who, under this name or under that, have ever been the God of the wretched, and the Father of the broken-hearted, look down upon this miserable little grub whom You have created, and whose brain You had filled with all those splendid dreams which now You have shattered and swept aside. Before I come to You, grant me this last request: give me a little time with the woman I love, so that I may make my peace with her and hear her words of forgiveness."

He walked onwards, past the huge obelisk of Hatshepsut, and in amongst the mass of fallen blocks of stone which lie heaped before the Sanctuary; but now frenzy seized him again, and, furiously resolving to meet his fate, he swung round and retraced his steps back to the first court, breathing imprecations as he went. Somehow, by some means, he must see Monimé before the final pro-

duction of the handcuffs gave him the signal for his suicide, which it was now too late to disguise as an accident.

"Blast them!" he muttered. "Blast them! Blast them! I'll show them that they can't go chasing innocent men across the world. I'll shoot the lot of them, and then I'll shoot myself." He stumbled over a fallen column. "Damnation!" he cried. "Who the devil left that thing lying about?—the silly idiots!"

Suddenly voices at the gateway came to his ears, and, with hammering heart, he realized that he had been tracked and that his hour was come. Thereupon he ran headlong through the dark forecourt of the small temple of Rameses the Third which stands at the south side of the main courtyard, and concealed himself, panting, in the sanctuary at its far end, a place to which there was but the one entrance.

Here he stood in the darkness, fingering his revolver, while the squeaking bats darted in and out of the doorway like little flying goblins. Presently he could see figures lit by lanterns coming towards him, and could plainly hear their voices.

"Here I am, you fools!" he called out loudly and defiantly; and the searchers came to an immediate halt, holding up their lanterns and peering through the darkness. "I have my revolver covering you," he shouted, "so don't come close, unless you want to be killed. Do any of you know where my wife is?"

"I'm here, Jim," came her quiet voice in the darkness. "Let me come to you."

"It's no good," said the Consul. "You'd better

surrender at once. You can't escape. Will you let me come and speak to you?"

"No," Jim answered. "I'll shoot anybody who tries to get in here, except my wife. Let me have a talk to her privately, and then you can come and take me and I won't resist." He might have added that by then he would be beyond resistance.

The night air was chilly, and the Consul did not relish the thought of waiting about while the criminal exchanged confidences with his wife. He therefore sharply ordered him to submit, and took two or three paces forward to emphasize his words. He came to a sudden standstill, however, when Jim's voice from the sanctuary told him in unmistakable tones that one further step would mean instant death.

"Oh, very well," he replied, with irritation. "I'll give you a quarter of an hour." He pulled his pipe and pouch from his pocket, and prepared to smoke. He prided himself on his heartlessness. He had once been a Custom House official.

"You'll give me as long as I choose to take," said Jim, again flaring up, "unless you prefer bloodshed. Come, Monimé, I have a lot to say to you."

She turned to her companions. "Have I your word of honour that you will leave him unmolested while we talk?"

"All right," the Consul replied, setting his lantern down on the ground, and casually lighting his pipe. His shadow was thrown across the forecourt and up the side wall like some monstrous and menacing apparition.

Thereat Monimé ran forward into the sanctuary,

and a moment later her arms were about her husband, and her lips were whispering words of encouragement and love.

"Oh, Jim, Jim!" she murmured at last. "Tell me what it's all about. They say you were married and that you killed your wife. Tell me the truth, I beg you."

"That is why I wanted to talk to you," he panted, putting his hand upon her throat as though he would throttle her. "You must know the truth. Ever since I met you again in Cyprus, I've been aching to tell you all about it; but I was a coward. I so dreaded the possibility of losing you." He threw out his arms and then clapped his hands to his head.

She seated herself on a fallen block of stone, and he slid to the ground at her feet. She was wearing an evening cloak, heavy with fur, and against this his face rested, while her mothering arms encircled him, and her hands were clasped upon his. The distant flicker of the lanterns made it possible for him dimly to discern the outline of her pale face; and in this uncertain light she seemed to become a celestial figure gazing down at him with such infinite tenderness that the ferment of his brain abated.

At first in halting phrases, but presently with increasing fluency, he told her of his inheritance of Eversfield Manor, of his marriage to Dolly, and of the three dreary years which followed. Then briefly he described his escape, his supposed death, and his wanderings which brought him to Cyprus.

"When I went back to England," he said, "it was with the idea of obtaining a divorce, so that you and I might be married. I had come to love you with

every fibre of my being, and life without you seemed unthinkable."

He told her of Smiley-face, of his meeting with Dolly in the woods, and how next day he had read of her murder. "I swear to you, as God sees me," he declared, "that I had nothing to do with her death. But who is going to believe me? I was the last person to be with her: my supposed motive is clear!"

He went on to relate how he had fled back to Egypt, and how, finding that the crime was placed at the door of another, he had felt himself free to ask her to marry him. Then had come the devastating news that he was wanted by the police, and his worst fears had been substantiated when he had caught sight of Mrs. Darling on his arrival at the hotel.

"The rest you know," he said. "I ran away just now in a frenzy of fear and rage; but that has left me and I am prepared. Feel my hand: it doesn't shake, you see. I am quite cool, now. They shall never take me to the scaffold, Monimé. They shall never make our story a public scandal. In a few minutes I am going to shoot myself. . . ."

She uttered a low cry of anguish. "Jim, Jim! What are you saying? We'll fight the case. We'll get the best lawyers in England to defend you. They'll have to realize that you are innocent."

"Do you believe I am innocent?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "I believe every word you have told me. My intuition is never wrong: and I know what you have told me is the truth."

The relief he felt at her belief in him was imme-

diate, and yet he was not able to grasp at once its full significance.

"The jury won't believe me," he said. "I meant to die by what would appear an accident; but things reached the crisis too quickly. I lost my head. If I don't end things here and now, our son will be branded as the son of a man who was hanged. Once I'm arrested I shall be watched night and day: there will not be another chance to die honourably."

"You mustn't speak of dying, my beloved," she murmured. "If you were to go, do you think I could live without you? I have got to bring up our son and watch over him until he can fend for himself. Do you think I shall be able to live long enough to do so if you have left me? If you die, Jim, my life will be so smashed that even the power of motherhood will fail to keep the breath in my body. If we had no child it might be different; we would go together now, into the valley of the shadows, and side by side we would find our way to the City of God, if at all it may be found. But as it is, I can't come with you; and you can't have the heart to leave me behind while there's still a chance that you need not have gone."

"Monimé," he answered, "listen to me. There is no hope. You are asking me to submit to imprisonment, a thing unthinkable to a wanderer like myself. You are asking me to submit to a trial in which your name will be dragged through the dirt as well as mine. You will be called the 'woman in the case'; my passion for you will be recorded as my motive. The story of our love will be travestied and brought up against you and our son all your

lives. Whereas, if I end it now, most of the tale will never be told in open court, and the whole thing will soon be forgotten."

She laughed. "Do you think I weigh gossip against the chance, however remote, of the trial going in your favour? Do you think I care what they say against me in the court if there is any hope of your acquittal? My darling, I shall fight for your life and your good name, which is mine and Ian's, too, to my last ounce of strength and my last penny; and in the end there will be victory, because you are innocent, and innocence shows its face as surely as guilt."

"You really do believe what I say—that I had absolutely nothing to do with her death?" he asked, still hardly daring to credit her trust. His experiences with Dolly had left him with so profound a scepticism in regard to female mentality that even his adoration of Monimé was not wholly proof against it.

She looked down at him, and he seemed to detect an expression upon her face which was almost defiant. "My dear," she said, "as far as I am concerned, even if you were guilty it would make no difference."

He stared at her incredulously, for man does not know woman, nor can he penetrate to the source of her deepest convictions. It was not Monimé, it was no individual, who had spoken: it was eternal woman.

"Nothing can alter love," she explained. "Can't a man understand that?"

"No," he answered, "only woman and God love in that way."

Suddenly he seemed to realize to the full the glory of her sympathy and understanding. It was as though their love in this moment of bitter trial had passed the greatest of all tests, and stood now triumphant, the conqueror of life and death.

All the years of misery were blotted out in the wonder of this revelation of womanhood, and on the instant his desire for life in unity with her came surging back into his heart.

"Monimé," he said, "this is the biggest moment of all. Whatever I may suffer will be worth while, because it will have brought me the knowledge that our love transcends the ways of man. By God!—I'll stand my trial; I'll make a fight for my life, even though the chances of success are small. I didn't know that such love existed."

She laughed. "You didn't know," she whispered, "because, as I once told you, men don't bother to study women."

He looked up at her in the dim light, and of a sudden it seemed to his overwrought fancy that the sanctuary was filled with her presence, as though she were one with the women of all the ages, pressing forward from every side to tend him, to bind up his wounds, to stand by him in his adversity, to forgive his sins. He saw her revealed to him as the eternal woman, the everlasting companion, wife and mother, for ever watching over his welfare, for ever acting upon a code of principles other than that of man, for ever drawing knowledge from sources unattainable to man. Of no account were the little

shams of the sex, such as Dolly; they were swamped amidst the hosts of the good and the true. It had been his misfortune to encounter one of the former; but his disillusionment was forgotten in the all-pervading sympathy which now enfolded him like the tender wings of Hathor.

He scrambled to his feet and stood before her, gazing into her shadowy face. "Come," he said, "the night air is too chilly for you. You must go back to the hotel, and I must go with these confounded little tin soldiers." His voice was cheery and his head was held high once more.

They came out of the black sanctuary hand-in-hand, and stood in the columned portico before the entrance, in the dimly reflected light of the lanterns.

"Well, have you finished?" the Consul asked, knocking out the ashes from his pipe against the uplifted heel of his boot.

"Yes, I am ready now," Jim replied very quietly.

He unloaded his revolver, shaking the cartridges into his hand, thereafter holding out the empty weapon to the native policeman, who, being a Sou-dani, was the first to take the risk of approach.

"Give me the handcuffs," said the Consul to the police officer.

Jim extended his wrists, and as he did so his face was averted and his eyes were fixed upon Monimé. On her lips was the smile of Hathor and of Isis—serene, confident, inscrutable, all-wise.

Chapter XXII: THE SHADOW OF DEATH

JIM spent the night at the police-station, where a military camp-bed was provided for him in an empty whitewashed room. Late in the evening his overcoat, guitar-case and kit-bag were brought to him from the hotel, the latter containing a few clothes and necessities; and, pinned to his pyjamas, was a sheet of notepaper upon which, in Monimé's handwriting, were the pencilled words: "Keep up your spirits. I shall come to England with you, my beloved."

A surprising languor had descended upon him after the excitements of the evening, and it was not long before he fell into a profound sleep, from which he was aroused before daybreak by the entrance of a native policeman, who deposited a candle upon the cement floor and informed him that he was to be taken down to Cairo by the day train due to depart at dawn. A cup of native coffee was presently brought in, together with a pile of stale sandwiches, which, he was told, had been sent from the hotel on the previous evening; but, having no appetite, he placed these in the pocket of his coat.

After the lapse of a dreary and bitterly cold half hour, the Consul entered the cell, bluntly bidding him good morning. "I have orders," he said, "to bring you down to Cairo myself."

"That *will* be jolly," Jim answered gloomily.

The Consul adjusted his eyeglasses and stared at

him coldly. "I must warn you," he mumbled, "that anything you say may be taken down in evidence against you."

"That'll make the journey jollier still," said Jim. Now that Monimé knew all, and had declared that she loved and trusted him, he was in much happier mood, and could face the shadow of death with sufficient equanimity to permit him to jest with his captors. But exasperation returned to his mind when in answer to his inquiry he was told that his wife had not been informed of his immediate departure, nor had the authorities any concern with her or her movements.

"'The sin ye do by two and two ye must pay for one by one,' " quoted the Consul, to whom Kipling was as the Bible.

"Oh, shut up!" said Jim. "Get out your notebook and write down that I declare I'm innocent and that the police are bungling fools."

On the journey down to Cairo he and the Consul occupied a compartment which had been reserved for them. A policeman was stationed in the corridor, and the windows on the opposite side were screened by the wooden shutters which serve as blinds in Egyptian railway trains. There was nothing to do except smoke the cigarettes he had been permitted to buy at the station, or doze in his corner, while his companion complacently read a novel and smoked his pipe on the opposite seat, occasionally glancing at him over the top of his eyeglasses.

Fourteen hours of this sort of thing was enough to reduce him to a condition of complete desperation, and when at last the train jolted over the points

into the terminus at Cairo, he had almost made up his mind to bolt and to attempt to return to England on his own account. He was well guarded, however, and soon he was deposited for the night at the Consulate. Next day he was taken, handcuffed, to the station, where he was pushed into the train for Port Said under the eyes of a gaping crowd. He was now in the charge of a Scotch ex-sergeant serving in the Egyptian Police, who had been lent for the purpose; and on the following morning this man, assisted by native policemen, conveyed him to the liner which was to carry him to England.

Here an interior cabin had been assigned to him, a small glass panel in the door having been removed so that he might be at all times under observation; and here for the twelve weary days of the journey he was confined, with nothing to relieve the tedium except an occasional visit from the kindly captain, a nightly breath of fresh air on the deserted deck, the reading of the novels which were considerately sent down to him from the ship's library, and the playing of his guitar, which by favour of the Cairene authorities he had been allowed to retain.

His depression was deepened by his inability to obtain any news of Monimé, but he presumed that she would know his whereabouts, and she had said that she would follow him to England. At any rate there would be no lack of money for her journey and the ultimate expenses of the trial; for he was now, of course, once more owner of the Eversfield property, and Tundering-West was again his name.

During these days his mind dwelt for hours together upon the problems of life as they presented

themselves to a man of his Bedouin temperament, and clearly he began to see that it was not enough merely to live and let live. As he lay sprawling upon his berth, staring at the white-painted walls and at the locked door of the cabin, or as he paced the narrow area of flooring or sat listening to the rhythmic throbbing of the engines, it became apparent to him that the recognition of some sort of obligation to society at large was essential, if only for the sake of his son.

He had always been an outlaw, hating organized society, and naming it, like the wise Giacomo Leopardi, "that extoller and enjoiner of all false virtues; that detractor and persecutor of all true ones; that opponent of all essential greatness which can become a man, and derider of every lofty sentiment unless it be spurious; that slave of the strong and tyrant of the weak."

Yet he saw now that to some extent it was necessary to conform to its ways. The art of life, in fact, was to conform without being consumed, to submit without being submerged. But in his case he had, by his inconsideration, managed to put people's backs up on all sides, and now, when he needed their friendship, for his wife and his child if not for himself, he was friendless.

He had contributed nothing, he felt, to his fellow men. He had carried his dreams locked in his head, and only occasionally had he troubled to write them down in the form of verse. He had squandered the gifts with which he was endowed; he had wasted the years; and now, in his desperate plight, there was no one to come forward to say a

word in his defence. Public opinion would declare him guilty, and he would have to fight for his life not only against an absence of sympathy, but against a bias in his disfavour.

Monimé, too, had gone her own way, ignoring the conventions, following with him the law of nature and not respecting that law in the form into which man has had to twist and limit it to meet the conditions of civilized society. And now they and their son would be the sufferers. They were a pair of outcasts; and yet she, as individually he understood her, was a personification of the glory of womanhood. They were vagrants; their love, at the outset, had been Bedouin love; and how they must pay the price.

The troubles by which he was surrounded had had a salutary effect upon his character, and had aroused him to his shortcomings. Before he had inherited the family property his life had been of an indefinite and dreamy character; at Eversfield he had been suppressed and rendered ineffectual; but since he had come to love Monimé he had emerged from this stagnation, and in the strongly contrasted turmoil of his subsequent life he had, as the saying is, found himself.

As the vessel passed up the Thames and approached its moorings at Tilbury, he had the feeling that, grasped in the relentless tentacles, he was being drawn in towards the cold, fat body of the octopus against which he had always fought. Perhaps he would be devoured, perhaps he would be vomited forth unharmed; but, whatever the issue, he had no power to resist, and must assuredly be sucked

into that horrible mouth. There had been times during the voyage when he lay in his berth, sick with the dread of it; but now that his destination was nearly reached he felt an eager desire to be up and fighting for his life and liberty.

There had been times, too, when he had turned with aching heart to his guitar, and had sat for hours on the edge of his berth, playing and singing melancholy ditties and songs of love. He was ever unaware of the beauty of his voice, and he would have been surprised had he been able to see the wrapt faces of the stewards and others who used to gather at the door to listen, and who would sometimes peep at the wild figure bending over the strings.

At Tilbury he had to face an army of cameramen who ran before him snapping him as he came down the gangway in charge of two policemen. A motor police-van conveyed him thence to the prison where he was to await the formal proceedings in the magistrate's court; and here at last he experienced the full rigour of the criminal's lot. Until now he had been confined in rooms not intended for imprisonment; but here he found himself in an actual cell, designed and built to cage the arbitrary and the recalcitrant. The iron bars, the ingenious mechanism of the lock and bolt, the inaccessible window, the uniformed warder in the passage outside—these were all instruments of the great octopus, and obedient to its word: "Thou shalt have none other gods but me."

In the late afternoon he lay upon his bed in a comatose state, due to his nervous exhaustion; but whenever sleep came upon him his active brain

created a picture of his coming trial, so dreadful that he had to fight his way, so it seemed, back to consciousness to avoid it. He saw the crowded court, and the hundreds of eyes that watched him as he stood in the dock, and it appeared to him that the judge was none other than the fat, leering spectre which at Eversfield had come to represent his married life and its respectable surroundings. But now the creature no longer coaxed and wheedled; it was impelled only by malice and revenge, and the flabby hand was pointed at him in cold accusation, or raised with a sweeping gesture to indicate the all-embracing power of the great octopus.

In momentary dreams and in half-conscious thought his fevered brain gradually formed into words this monstrous judge's summary of his actions, so that he seemed to be listening to the story of his life as interpreted by his fellow men. "Vile creature," the voice droned, "coward, bully, and assassin, let me recount to you the steps which have led you to the scaffold. As a young man you deserted the post at which your good father had placed you, and, unable to do an honest day's work, you fled over the seas and attached yourself to the world's riff-raff, thereby breaking the parental heart. Having squandered your patrimony, you came at last to some low haunt in the city of Alexandria, and there, meeting a woman of loose morals, you cohabited with her, but deserted her when she was with child."

"It's a lie!" he heard himself screaming, as he struggled to loose himself from the grip of the attendant policemen.

"The facts speak for themselves," the accusing

voice continued. "You deserted her because you had inherited your uncle's money, and were lured back to England by the love of gold. In your own ancestral village you used your position to bully your tenants; you assaulted one of your honest farmers, you insulted the saintly vicar, and the local medical officer; you incurred the mistrust of the simple villagers. Your only friend was a filthy poacher and thief. You pursued the most comely maiden in the neighbourhood, and did not desist until you had encompassed her downfall. But, having married her, you treated her like a bully, and at length you deserted her, too, as you had deserted your former mistress."

"Lies! Lies!" he shouted. "I will not listen!"

"Returning to your disreputable life in low haunts, you were involved in a cut-throat affray in Italy; and, escaping from this, you pretended to have been murdered, and allowed your assailant to stand his trial on that charge. Thus you thought to escape from the bonds of wedlock, and with a lie upon your lips you returned to the arms of your mistress, proposing to her a bigamous marriage. But, fearing detection, and needing money, you sneaked home; lured into the woods the sorrowing woman who, deeming herself a widow, mourned your memory; and there did her to death."

"I am innocent!" he gasped, looking about him in desperation at the hard faces which surrounded him and hemmed him in. "Of her death at any rate I am innocent."

"You fled, then, back to your lover," the voice went on, "and ruthlessly involved her in your coming

débâcle. When the officers of the law had hunted you down you threatened them with death; but presently, running from them like a coward, and being too craven to take your own life, you were ignominiously captured, and brought trembling to this place of justice. Enemy of society, lazy and useless member of the community, wretched victim of your own lusts, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

Wildly he struggled to free himself, and so awoke, bathed in perspiration and shaking in every limb. "O God!" he cried, beating his fists upon the bed, "take away from me this vision of myself as others see me. Because I have turned in contempt from the Great Sham, because I have dared to be independent, must I pay the penalty with my life, and go accursed to my grave? Must Monimé, must Ian suffer for my mistakes, and bear the burden of my sins?"

For an hour and more he paced his cell in torment; but at last the door was opened and a clergyman entered, announcing himself as the prison chaplain, and politely asking whether he might be of service.

"Yes," said Jim without hesitation, looking at him with bloodshot eyes, "go away and pray for me."

But his visitor was too accustomed to the bitterness of the prisoner's heart to accept this rebuff, and held his ground. "I am one of those who believe in your innocence," he said, "and that being so, I should like to say that I am proud to meet you."

Jim pushed the hair back from his damp fore-

head and glanced quickly at him. "Is that a figure of speech?" he asked, menacingly.

"Why, of course not: I mean it," the chaplain replied. "The whole English-speaking world is under the deepest debt to you."

Jim stared at him in astonishment. "I don't understand," he muttered.

"Well, you are the James Easton who wrote *Songs of the Highroad*, are you not?"

"Oh, *that!*" Jim smiled. "The book is out, is it? I thought they were going to publish late in the spring."

"My dear sir," the visitor exclaimed, "do you mean to say you haven't seen the reviews?"

"No, I don't know anything about it," Jim answered.

"But every man of letters in the country is talking about it. We have all hailed you as the greatest poet of modern times. Why, the one poem, 'The Nile,' is enough to bring you immortality. My dear sir, do you really mean that this is news to you?"

"Of course it is," said Jim. "I haven't read the papers for weeks." He sat down suddenly upon his bed, his knees refusing their office.

The chaplain spread out his hands in wonder. "But don't you know that your arrest has caused the biggest sensation ever known in recent years? First comes the book, and you are hailed as a public benefactor, the friend and interpreter of struggling humanity, the genius of the age, the 'uncrowned laureate of England; and then the discovery is made that you are one with the James Tundering-West, alias James Easton, wanted on the charge of murder.

Why, it has been dumbfounding to us all. Nobody can believe that you are guilty."

"I'm not, padre," said Jim quietly. "But the evidence is pretty damning, you know. I *was* there in the woods with my wife."

"Well, you will have public opinion on your side," the chaplain continued. "A man like you, who has given so much to the world, will certainly receive the maximum of consideration."

"But . . . but," Jim stammered, a lump in his throat, "I've given nothing. I've been a selfish beast, going my own way, ignoring my obligation to society. Why, all the way home in the steamer I've been telling myself that my life has been useless. And just now the judge said . . . Oh, padre, the things he said! . . . No, that was only a dream; but the fact remains, I've been useless."

"Useless!" his visitor laughed. "Why, man, you will be beloved and thanked for generations to come. How little do we realize when we are being of use!"

Long after his visitor had gone Jim sat dazed and overawed. He cared nothing for his actual triumph, but there were no bounds to his thankfulness that at last he might appear worthy of the love of Monimé. He slept little that night. He was alternately miserable and exultant, and there were moments when he could with difficulty refrain from battering at the door with his fists, in a frenzy to be out and away over the hills.

Daylight brought no relief to the confusion of his mind; and by mid-morning, as he sat waiting for something to happen, hovering between hope and dread, his head seemed nigh to bursting.

But suddenly all things were changed. The door of his cell was opened and a warder entered. Jim did not look up: his face was buried in his hands in a vain effort to collect his thoughts.

"There's your wife to see you, sir," said the warder, tapping his shoulder. "You are to come with me."

Jim sprang to his feet, his eyes blinking, his hair tossed about his forehead. Down the corridor he was led, and up a flight of stairs. The door of the visitor's room was opened, and a moment later the beloved arms were about his neck, and the warder had stepped back into the passage.

"It's all right, my darling!" she cried. "We've found the murderer. The order for your release will come through at once: you'll be out of this in an hour or so. Oh, Jim, Jim, Jim, my darling, my darling!"

He was incredulous, and in breathless haste she told him what had happened. She had come back to England by the quick route, and, travelling across country, had arrived some days before his ship had completed the long sea route by way of the Peninsula.

"Mrs. Darling came with me," she said. "Oh, Jim, she's been splendid."

"What d'you mean?" he asked in astonishment. "She is my accuser."

"Oh, that was only natural," Monimé explained. "That was a mother's instinctive feeling. But we talked all through that terrible night at Luxor, and long before we left Egypt I think she realized she had made a mistake. You see, as soon as the police were able to prove that Merrivall's housekeeper

was not guilty she at once thought it must have been you after all, and she swore she'd hunt you down. She came to Egypt with the concurrence of the police, who had an unconfirmed report about your having been seen at Abu Simbel."

"Never mind about all that," Jim interrupted. "Tell me who did it. . . . Oh, for God's sake tell me they've really got the man!"

Monimé reassured him. "Listen," she went on. "As soon as we arrived in England I made Mrs. Darling take me down to Eversfield, and we started our own inquiries. You had spoken of having sent your poacher friend off to get Mrs. Darling's address from the postman; so of course we went first to the post-office, and Mr. Barnes was quite emphatic that Smiley-face was only with him for a few minutes early in the afternoon."

Jim's face fell. "I feared as much," he groaned. "You're on the wrong scent. You're suggesting that Smiley did it."

"I'm not suggesting," she answered with triumph. "He *did* do it. He has confessed."

He stared at her in dismay. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, and, turning away, stood lost in thought. He had not believed it possible that the poacher was in any way connected with the crime, for his errand in the village had seemed to account for his time, and later in the afternoon he had returned with perfect composure.

"Has the poor chap been arrested?" he asked at length.

Monimé shook her head. "No," she said, "he is in the infirmary at Oxford. They hardly expected him to live yesterday, after all the strain of making

his confession to us and then to the police." It was his heart, it seemed, that had given out, a fact at which Jim was not surprised, for when he had met him on that memorable day it was evident that he was very ill.

"Poor old Smiley!" he murmured. "He did it for my sake."

Monimé's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Jim," she said. "I'm so cross with you. To think that you never let me know you were a great poet. You said you only scribbled doggerel. When I read this book of your poems I cried my eyes out, with pride and temper and love and fear. Didn't you realize you were writing things that would live?"

"Good Lord, no!" he answered. "I thought you'd think them awful rot."

The order from the Home Secretary for Jim's release was not long delayed, and soon after mid-day he was a free man once more, enjoying a bath and a change of clothes at the hotel where his wife was staying. Here, when his toilet was complete, Mrs. Darling came to see him, and he was surprised to observe the affectionate relationship which seemed to exist between her and Monimé.

"Jim, my dear," she said, when the somewhat difficult greetings were exchanged. "I am a wicked old woman to have brought such unhappiness upon you; but you will know what I felt about my Dolly's cruel end." She passed her plump hand over her eyes. "I can't yet bear to think of it."

"Yes, I know," he answered. "But you might have realized that I would not have done such a thing."

"I see that now," she said. "This dear girl has

explained you to me, so that I see you as clear as crystal. She has pointed out that you will neither let anybody interfere with your life nor will you interfere with theirs. You just live and let live. I hadn't quite understood that, but I see it now, and your poems, too, have helped me to understand. Isn't it true that if you once remove understanding from life you get every kind of complication! It is our business as women to make a study of the workings of men's minds; but in this case I made a miserable hash of it. . . . Oh dear, oh dear!" she muttered, and suddenly, sitting down heavily upon a chair, she wept loudly, rocking her fat little body to and fro.

Jim was not able to remain long to comfort her. He had determined to catch an afternoon express to Oxford to try to see the dying Smiley-face before the end; and he had arranged to return by the late evening train, so that he and Monimé might go down next morning to join their little son on the south coast.

He evaded a mob of journalists at the door of the hotel, and reached Oxford after the winter sun had set, driving to the infirmary in a scurry of snow. In an ante-room he explained his mission to the matron, who seemed much relieved that he had come.

"He's been asking about you all day, and begging us to tell him if you had been released," she said. "It's almost as though he were clinging on to life until he knew you were safe. He's a poor, half-witted creature. It's a mercy he is dying."

Jim was taken into a small room leading from one of the large wards; and here, in the dim light

of a green-shaded electric globe, he saw a nurse leaning over the sick man's bed. He saw the poacher's red hair, now less tousled than he had known it in the open, and of a more pronounced colour by reason of its washing and combing; he saw the drawn features, and the shut eyes; he saw the rough, hairy hands lying inert upon the white quilt: and for a moment he thought he had arrived too late.

The matron, however, exchanged a whispered word with the nurse; and presently a sign was made to him to approach. He thereupon seated himself at the bedside, and laid his hand upon Smiley's arm.

For some moments there was silence in the room; but at length the little pig-like eyes opened, and Jim could see the sudden expression of relief and happiness which at once lit up the whole face.

"Forgive me, forgive me," the dying man whispered. "I didn't know they'd taken you. If I'd ha' known that, I'd ha' told them at once. I thought you was safe in them furrin lands; and when your lady come yesterday and said they'd cotched you and put you in the lock-up, I thought I'd go clean off it, I did."

Jim pressed his hand. "Smiley," he said, "why did you do it?"

"Seemed like it was the only way," he replied. "When I come back into the woods to wait for you, I heerd you and her talking, and I listened; and then I heerd her say as 'ow she'd make your name stink in the nostrils of every gen'l'man, and I knew you couldn't never be rid o' her. Then her come running past where I was a-hiding, and her tripped up and fell. Fair stunned, her was. I thought her

was dead, her lay that still. So I reckoned I'd make sure. I did it quick, with a stone. Her made no sound."

"But why did you do it?" Jim repeated.

Smiley-face grinned. "Because you was my friend, and her was your enemy. Because I remembered your face that day when you was a-weeping down there in the woods, and a-longing to be free again."

He closed his eyes and for some moments he did not speak. At length, however, he looked at Jim once more, and his lips moved. "Parson do say God be werry merciful," he whispered. "Maybe He'll understand why I done it. But I don't care if He send I into hell fire, now I know you're happy. Tell me, sir, what be you going to do?"

"I'm going away, Smiley," replied Jim. "I've got a lot of work to do. We are going to find a little house overlooking the Mediterranean, and in the years to come, when all this is forgotten, we shall come back here, perhaps, and get the place ready for my son. You'd like my son, Smiley: he's a fine little lad."

The poacher nodded. "When you come back here," he said, "go down into the woods and whistle to me the same as you used to do. I shall hear. I shall say: 'There's my dear a-calling of me. Friends sticks to friends through thick and thin.' And maybe they'll let me answer you. . . ."

His voice trailed off, but his lips smiled. "Oh, them little rabbits," he chuckled.

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